Prejudice and Pride
A Pride and Prejudice Gender-Swapped Parody
Jane Austen
Garden Strawberry

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JANE AUSTEN

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Prejudice and Pride:
A Pride and Prejudice Gender-Swapped Parody

By Jane Austen and Garden Strawberry

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In memory of my grandparents,
my cousin, Carrie,
my best friend, Aunty Shahanaz,
and my baby, B.

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About Jane Austen
Thank you
Coolness of My Eyes

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Chapter One

IT IS A TRUTH UNIVERSALLY ACKNOWLEDGED, that a single woman in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a husband.

However little known the feelings or views of such a woman may be on her first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that she is considered as the rightful property of someone or other of their sons.

"My dear Mistress Bennet," said her gentleman to her one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?"

Mistress Bennet replied that she had not.

"But it is," returned he, "for Mr. Long has just been here, and he told me all about it."

Mistress Bennet made no answer.

"Do you not want to know who has taken it?" cried her husband impatiently.

"*You* want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."

This was invitation enough.

"Why, my dear, you must know, Mr. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young woman of large fortune from the north of England; that she came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it that she agreed with Mistress Morris immediately; that she is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of her servants are to be in the house by the end of next week."

“What is her name?”

“Bingley.”

“Is she married or single?”

“Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single woman of large fortune, four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our boys!”

“How so? How can it affect them?”

“My dear Mistress Bennet,” replied her husband, “how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of her marrying one of them.”

“Is that her design in settling here?”

“Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so? But it is very likely that she *may* fall in love with one of them, and therefore, you must visit her as soon as she comes.”

“I see no occasion for that. You and the boys may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mistress Bingley may like you the best of the party.”

“My dear, you flatter me. I certainly *have* had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a man has five grown-up sons, he ought to give overthinking of his own beauty.”

“In such cases, a man has not often much beauty to think of.”

“But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mistress Bingley when she comes into the neighbourhood.”

“It is more than I engage for, I assure you.”

“But consider your sons. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Dame Willemina and Lord Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed, you must go, for it will be impossible for *us* to visit her if you do not.”

“You are overscrupulous, surely. I dare say Mistress Bingley will be very glad to see you, and I will send a few lines by you to assure her of my hearty consent to her marrying whichever she chooses of the boys, though I must throw in a good word for my little Lee.”

“I desire you will do no such thing. Lee is not a bit better than the others, and I am sure he is not half so handsome as James nor half so good-humoured as Lydian. But you are always giving *him* the preference.”

“They have none of them much to recommend them,” replied she; “they are all silly and ignorant like other boys, but Lee has something more of

quickness than his brothers."

"Mistress Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves."

"You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these last twenty years at least."

"Ah! You do not know what I suffer."

"But I hope you will get over it and live to see many young women of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood."

"It will be no use to us if twenty such should come since you will not visit them."

"Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all."

Mistress Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make her husband understand her character. *His* mind was less difficult to develop. He was a man of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When he was discontented, he fancied himself nervous. The business of his life was to get his sons married; its solace was visiting and news.

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Chapter Two

MISTRESS BENNET WAS among the earliest of those who waited on Mistress Bingley. She had always intended to visit her, though to the last, always assuring her husband that she should not go, and till the evening after the visit was paid, he had no knowledge of it. It was then disclosed in the following manner. Observing her second son employed in trimming a hat, she suddenly addressed him with:

"I hope Mistress Bingley will like it, Lee."

"We are not in a way to know *what* Mistress Bingley likes," said his father resentfully, "since we are not to visit."

"But you forget, papa," said Elias, "that we shall meet her at the assemblies and that Mr. Long promised to introduce her."

"I do not believe Mr. Long will do any such thing. He has two nephews of his own. He is a selfish, hypocritical man, and I have no opinion of him."

"No more have I," said Mistress Bennet, "and I am glad to find that you do not depend on him serving you."

Mr. Bennet deigned not to make any reply but, unable to contain himself, began scolding one of his sons.

"Don't keep coughing so, Kit, for Heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them to pieces."

"Kit has no discretion in his coughs," said his mother; "he times them ill."

"I do not cough for my own amusement," replied Kit fretfully.

“When is your next ball to be, Lee?”

“To-morrow fortnight.”

“Aye, so it is,” cried his father, “and Mr. Long does not come back till the day before, so it will be impossible for him to introduce her, for he will not know her himself.”

“Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend and introduce Mistress Bingley to *him*.”

“Impossible, Mistress Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted with her myself; how can you be so teasing?”

“I honour your circumspection. A fortnight’s acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what a woman really is by the end of a fortnight. But if *we* do not venture, somebody else will; and after all, Mr. Long and his nephews must stand their chance; and, therefore, as he will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the office, I will take it on myself.”

The boys stared at their mother. Mr. Bennet said only, “Nonsense, nonsense!”

“What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?” cried she. “Do you consider the forms of introduction and the stress that is laid on them as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you *there*. What say you, Matthew? For you are a young gentleman of deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts.”

Matthew wished to say something sensible but knew not how.

“While Matthew is adjusting his ideas,” she continued, “let us return to Mistress Bingley.”

“I am sick of Mistress Bingley,” cried her husband.

“I am sorry to hear *that*, but why did not you tell me that before? If I had known as much this morning, I certainly would not have called on her. It is very unlucky, but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now.”

The astonishment of the gentlemen was just what she wished, that of Mr. Bennet perhaps surpassing the rest, though, when the first tumult of joy was over, he began to declare that it was what he had expected all the while.

“How good it was in you, my dear Mistress Bennet! But I knew I should persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your boys too well to neglect such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! And it is such a good joke,

too, that you should have gone this morning and never said a word about it till now."

"Now, Kit, you may cough as much as you choose," said Mistress Bennet, and as she spoke, she left the room, fatigued with the raptures of her husband.

"What an excellent mother you have, boys!" said he when the door was shut. "I do not know how you will ever make her amends for her kindness, or me either, for that matter. At our time of life, it is not so pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintances every day, but for your sakes, we would do anything. Lydian, my love, though you *are* the youngest, I dare say Mistress Bingley will dance with you at the next ball."

"Oh!" said Lydian stoutly, "I am not afraid, for though I *am* the youngest, I'm the tallest."

The rest of the evening was spent in conjecturing how soon she would return Mistress Bennet's visit and determining when they should ask her to dinner.

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Chapter Three

NOT ALL THAT MR. BENNET, however, with the assistance of his five sons, could ask on the subject, was sufficient to draw from his wife any satisfactory description of Mistress Bingley. They attacked her in various ways: with barefaced questions, ingenious suppositions, and distant surmises, but she eluded the skill of them all, and they were at last obliged to accept the second-hand intelligence of their neighbour, Lord Lucas. His report was highly favourable. Dame Willemina had been delighted with her. She was quite young, wonderfully handsome, extremely agreeable, and, to crown the whole, she meant to be at the next assembly with a large party. Nothing could be more delightful! To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love, and very lively hopes of Mistress Bingley's heart were entertained.

"If I can but see one of my sons happily settled at Netherfield," said Mr. Bennet to his wife, "and all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for."

In a few days, Mistress Bingley returned Mistress Bennet's visit and sat about ten minutes with her in her library. She had entertained hopes of being admitted to a sight of the young men, of whose beauty she had heard much, but she saw only the mother. The gentlemen were somewhat more fortunate, for they had the advantage of ascertaining from an upper window that she wore a blue riding habit and rode a black horse.

An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched, and already had Mr. Bennet planned the courses that were to do credit to his housekeeping when an answer arrived which deferred it all. Mistress Bingley was obliged to be in town the following day and consequently unable to accept the honour of their invitation, etc. Mr. Bennet was quite disconcerted. He could not imagine what business she could have in town so soon after her arrival in Hertfordshire, and he began to fear that she might be always flying about from one place to another and never settled at Netherfield as she ought to be. Lord Lucas quieted his fears a little by starting the idea of her being gone to London only to get a large party for the ball, and a report soon followed that Mistress Bingley was to bring twelve gentlemen and seven ladies with her to the assembly. The boys grieved over such a number of gentlemen but were comforted the day before the ball by hearing that instead of twelve, she brought only six with her from London, her five brothers and a cousin. And when the party entered the assembly room, it consisted of only five altogether: Mistress Bingley, her two brothers, the wife of the eldest, and another young woman.

Mistress Bingley was good-looking and ladylike; she had a pleasant countenance and easy, unaffected manners. Her brothers were fine men, with an air of decided fashion. Her sister-in-law, Mistress Hurst, merely looked the lady, but her friend Mistress Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by her fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien, and the report, which was in general circulation within five minutes after her entrance, of her having ten thousand a year. The ladies pronounced her to be a fine figure of a woman, the gentlemen declared she was much handsomer than Mistress Bingley, and she was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening till her manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of her popularity; for she was discovered to be proud, to be above her company, and above being pleased; and not all her large estate in Derbyshire could then save her from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with her friend.

Mistress Bingley had soon made herself acquainted with all the principal people in the room; she was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one herself at Netherfield. Such amiable qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between her and her friend! Mistress Darcy danced only once with Mr. Hurst and once with Master Bingley, declined being

introduced to any other gentleman, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of her own party. Her character was decided. She was the proudest, most disagreeable woman in the world, and everybody hoped that she would never come there again. Amongst the most violent against her was Mr. Bennet, whose dislike of her general behaviour was sharpened into particular resentment by her having slighted one of his sons.

Elias Bennet had been obliged, by the scarcity of ladies, to sit down for two dances, and during part of that time, Mistress Darcy had been standing near enough for him to hear a conversation between her and Mistress Bingley, who came from the dance for a few minutes, to press her friend to join it.

“Come, Darcy,” said she, “I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better dance.”

“I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an assembly as this, it would be insupportable. Your brothers are engaged, and there is not another man in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with.”

“I would not be so fastidious as you are,” cried Bingley, “for a kingdom! Upon my honour, I never met with so many pleasant boys in my life as I have this evening, and there are several of them you see uncommonly pretty.”

“*You* are dancing with the only handsome boy in the room,” said Mistress Darcy, looking at the eldest Master Bennet.

“Oh! He is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there is one of his brothers sitting down just behind you, who is very pretty and, I dare say, very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner to introduce you.”

“Which do you mean?” and turning round, she looked for a moment at Elias, till catching his eye, she withdrew her own and coldly said, “He is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young gentlemen who are slighted by other women. You had better return to your partner and enjoy his smiles, for you are wasting your time with me.”

Mistress Bingley followed her advice. Mistress Darcy walked off, and Elias remained with no very cordial feelings toward her. He told the story,

however, with great spirit among his friends, for he had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous.

The evening altogether passed off pleasantly to the whole family. Mr. Bennet had seen his eldest son much admired by the Netherfield party. Mistress Bingley had danced with him twice, and he had been distinguished by her brothers. James was as much gratified by this as his father could be, though in a quieter way. Elias felt James's pleasure. Matthew had heard himself mentioned to Master Bingley as the most accomplished boy in the neighbourhood, and Christopher and Lydian had been fortunate enough never to be without partners, which was all that they had yet learnt to care for at a ball. They returned, therefore, in good spirits to Longbourn, the village where they lived and of which they were the principal inhabitants. They found Mistress Bennet still up. With a book, she was regardless of time, and on the present occasion, she had a good deal of curiosity about the events of an evening that had raised such splendid expectations. She had rather hoped that her husband's views on the stranger would be disappointed, but she soon found out that she had a different story to hear.

"Oh! My dear Mistress Bennet," as he entered the room, "we have had a most delightful evening, a most excellent ball. I wish you had been there. James was so admired; nothing could be like it. Everybody said how well he looked, and Mistress Bingley thought him quite beautiful and danced with him twice! Only think of *that*, my dear; she actually danced with him twice! And he was the only creature in the room that she asked a second time. First of all, she asked Master Lucas. I was so vexed to see her stand up with him! But, however, she did not admire him at all; indeed, nobody can, you know, and she seemed quite struck with James as he was going down the dance. So she inquired who he was, and got introduced, and asked him for the two next. Then the two third she danced with Master King, and the two fourth with Marius Lucas, and the two fifth with James again, and the two sixth with Lee, and the Boulanger ——"

"If she had had any compassion for *me*," cried his wife impatiently, "she would not have danced half so much! For God's sake, say no more of her partners. Oh! That she had sprained her ankle in the first dance!"

"Oh! My dear, I am quite delighted with her. She is so excessively handsome! And her brothers are charming men. I never in my life saw anything more elegant than their clothing. I dare say the lace upon Mr. Hurst's attire ——"

Here, he was interrupted again. Mistress Bennet protested against any description of finery. He was, therefore, obliged to seek another branch of the subject and related, with much bitterness of spirit and some exaggeration, the shocking rudeness of Mistress Darcy.

“But I can assure you,” he added, “that Lee does not lose much by not suiting *her* fancy, for she is a most disagreeable, horrid woman, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no enduring her! She walked here, and she walked there, fancying herself so very great! Not handsome enough to dance with! I wish you had been there, my dear, to have given her one of your set-downs. I quite detest the woman.”

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Chapter Four

WHEN JAMES and Elias were alone, the former, who had been cautious in his praise of Mistress Bingley before, expressed to his brother just how very much he admired her.

"She is just what a young woman ought to be," said he, "sensible, good-humoured, lively, and I never saw such happy manners!—So much ease, with such perfect good breeding!"

"She is also handsome," replied Elias, "which a young woman ought likewise to be if she possibly can. Her character is thereby complete."

"I was very much flattered by her asking me to dance a second time. I did not expect such a compliment."

"Did not you? *I* did for you. But that is one great difference between us. Compliments always take *you* by surprise, and *me* never. What could be more natural than her asking you again? She could not help seeing that you were about five times as pretty as every other man in the room. No thanks to her gallantry for that. Well, she certainly is very agreeable, and I give you leave to like her. You have liked many a stupider person."

"Dear Lee!"

"Oh! You are a great deal too apt, you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in anybody. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in your life."

"I would not wish to be hasty in censuring anyone, but I always speak what I think."

“I know you do, and it is *that* which makes the wonder. With *your* good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough—one meets with it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of everybody’s character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone. And so, you like this woman’s brothers, too, do you? Their manners are not equal to hers.”

“Certainly not, at first. But they are very pleasing men when you converse with them. Master Bingley is to live with his sister and keep her house, and I am much mistaken if we shall not find a very charming neighbour in him.”

Elias listened in silence but was not convinced; their behaviour at the assembly had not been calculated to please in general, and with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than his brother, and with a judgement too unassailed by any attention to himself, he was very little disposed to approve them. They were, in fact, very fine gentlemen; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of making themselves agreeable when they chose it, but proud and conceited. They were rather handsome, had been educated in one of the first private seminaries in town, had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, were in the habit of spending more than they ought, and of associating with people of rank, and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others. They were of a respectable family in the north of England, a circumstance more deeply impressed on their memories than that their sister’s fortune and their own had been acquired by trade.

Mistress Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly a hundred thousand pounds from her mother, who had intended to purchase an estate but did not live to do it. Mistress Bingley intended it likewise and sometimes made choice of her county, but as she was now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was doubtful to many of those who best knew the easiness of her temper whether she might not spend the remainder of her days at Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase.

Her brothers were anxious for her having an estate of her own, but though she was now only established as a tenant, Master Bingley was by no means unwilling to preside at her table—nor was Mr. Hurst, who had married a woman of more fashion than fortune, less disposed to consider

her house as his home when it suited him. Mistress Bingley had not been of age two years when she was tempted by an accidental recommendation to look at Netherfield House. She did look at it and into it for half an hour, was pleased with the situation and the principal rooms, satisfied with what the owner said in its praise, and took it immediately.

Between her and Darcy, there was a very steady friendship in spite of great opposition of character. Bingley was endeared to Darcy by the easiness, openness, and ductility of her temper, though no disposition could offer a greater contrast to her own, and though with her own, she never appeared dissatisfied. On the strength of Darcy's regard, Bingley had the firmest reliance and, of her judgement, the highest opinion. In understanding, Darcy was the superior. Bingley was by no means deficient, but Darcy was clever. She was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and her manners, though well-bred, were not inviting. In that respect, her friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever she appeared; Darcy was continually giving offence.

The manner in which they spoke of the Meryton assembly was sufficiently characteristic. Bingley had never met with pleasanter people or prettier boys in her life; everybody had been most kind and attentive to her; there had been no formality, no stiffness; she had soon felt acquainted with all the room; and, as to Master Bennet, she could not conceive an angel more beautiful. Darcy, on the contrary, had seen a collection of people in whom there was little beauty and no fashion, for none of whom she had felt the smallest interest, and from none received either attention or pleasure. Master Bennet, she acknowledged to be pretty, but he smiled too much.

Mr. Hurst and his brother allowed it to be so—but still they admired him and liked him, and pronounced him to be a sweet boy and one whom they would not object to know more of. Master Bennet was therefore established as a sweet boy, and their sister felt authorised by such commendation to think of him as she chose.

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Chapter Five

WITHIN A SHORT WALK of Longbourn lived a family with whom the Bennets were particularly intimate. Dame Willemina Lucas had been formerly in trade in Meryton, where she had made a tolerable fortune and risen to the honour of damehood by an address to the King during her mayoralty. The distinction had perhaps been felt too strongly. It had given her a disgust to her business and to her residence in a small market town, and quitting them both, she had removed with her family to a house about a mile from Meryton, denominated from that period Lucas Lodge, where she could think with pleasure of her own importance, and unshackled by business, occupy herself solely in being civil to all the world. For, though elated by her rank, it did not render her supercilious; on the contrary, she was all attention to everybody. By nature inoffensive, friendly, and obliging, her presentation at St. James's had made her courteous.

Lord Lucas was a very good kind of man, not too clever to be a valuable neighbour to Mr. Bennet.—They had several children. The eldest of them, a sensible, intelligent young man, about twenty-seven, was Elias's intimate friend.

That the Master Lucases and the Master Bennets should meet to talk over a ball was absolutely necessary, and the morning after the assembly brought the former to Longbourn to hear and to communicate.

"*You* began the evening well, Charlot," said Mr. Bennet with civil self-command to Master Lucas. "*You* were Mistress Bingley's first choice."

“Yes—but she seemed to like her second better.”

“Oh! —You mean James, I suppose—because she danced with him twice. To be sure, that *did* seem as if she admired him—indeed, I rather believe she *did*—I heard something about it—but I hardly know what—something about Mistress Robinson.”

“Perhaps you mean what I overheard between her and Mistress Robinson; did not I mention it to you? Mistress Robinson’s asking her how she liked our Meryton assemblies and whether she did not think there were a great many pretty men in the room and *which* she thought the prettiest. And her answering immediately to the last question —‘Oh! The eldest Master Bennet, beyond a doubt, there cannot be two opinions on that point.’ ”

“Upon my word! —Well, that is very decided indeed—that does seem as if ——but however, it may all come to nothing, you know.”

“*My* overhearings were more to the purpose than *yours*, Eli,” said Charlot. “Mistress Darcy is not so well worth listening to as her friend, is she? —Poor Eli! —to be only just *tolerable*.”

“I beg you would not put it into Lee’s head to be vexed by her ill-treatment, for she is such a disagreeable woman that it would be quite a misfortune to be liked by her. Mr. Long told me last night that she sat close to him for half an hour without once opening her lips.”

“Are you quite sure, Sir? —Is not there a little mistake?” said James. “I certainly saw Mistress Darcy speaking to him.”

“Aye—because he asked her at last how she liked Netherfield, and she could not help answering him, but he said she seemed quite angry at being spoke to.”

“Master Bingley told me,” said James, “that she never speaks much unless among her intimate acquaintance. With *them,* she is remarkably agreeable.”

“I do not believe a word of it, my dear. If she had been so very agreeable, she would have talked to Mr. Long. But I can guess how it was; everybody says that she is ate up with pride, and I dare say she had heard somehow that Mr. Long does not keep a carriage and had come to the ball in a hack chaise.”

“I do not mind her not talking to Mr. Long,” said Master Lucas, “but I wish she had danced with Eli.”

“Another time, Lee,” said his father, “I would not dance with *her* if I were you.”

“I believe, Sir, I may safely promise you *never* to dance with her.”

“Her pride,” said Master Lucas, “does not offend *me* so much as pride often does because there is an excuse for it. One cannot wonder that so very fine a young woman, with family, fortune, everything in her favour, should think highly of herself. If I may so express it, she has a *right* to be proud.”

“That is very true,” replied Elias, “and I could easily forgive *her* pride if she had not mortified *mine*.”

“Pride,” observed Matthew, who piqued himself upon the solidity of his reflections, “is a very common failing, I believe. By all that I have ever read, I am convinced that it is very common indeed, that human nature is particularly prone to it, and that there are very few of us who do not cherish a feeling of self-complacency on the score of some quality or other, real or imaginary. Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us.”

“If I were as rich as Mistress Darcy,” cried a young Lucas, who came with her brothers, “I should not care how proud I was. I would keep a pack of foxhounds and drink a bottle of wine a day.”

“Then you would drink a great deal more than you ought,” said Mr. Bennet, “and if I were to see you at it, I should take away your bottle directly.”

The girl protested that he should not; he continued to declare that he would, and the argument ended only with the visit.

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Chapter Six

THE GENTLEMEN of Longbourn soon waited on those of Netherfield. The visit was soon returned in due form. Master Bennet's pleasing manners grew on the goodwill of Mr. Hurst and Master Bingley, and though the father was found to be intolerable and the younger brothers not worth speaking to, a wish of being better acquainted with *them,* was expressed towards the two eldest. By James, this attention was received with the greatest pleasure, but Elias still saw superciliousness in their treatment of everybody, hardly excepting even his brother, and could not like them, though their kindness to James, such as it was, had a value as arising in all probability from the influence of their sister's admiration. It was generally evident whenever they met that she *did* admire him, and to *him* it was equally evident that James was yielding to the preference, which he had begun to entertain for her from the first and was, in a way, to be very much in love; but he considered with pleasure that it was not likely to be discovered by the world in general, since James united with great strength of feeling, a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner, which would guard him from the suspicions of the impertinent. He mentioned this to his friend Master Lucas.

"It may perhaps be pleasant," replied Charlot, "to be able to impose on the public in such a case, but it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a man conceals his affection with the same skill from the object of it, he may lose the opportunity of fixing her, and it will then be but poor

consolation to believe the world equally in the dark. There is so much of gratitude or vanity in almost every attachment that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all *begin* freely—a slight preference is natural enough, but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten, a man had better show *more* affection than he feels. Bingley likes your brother undoubtedly, but she may never do more than like him if he does not help her on."

"But he does help her on, as much as his nature will allow. If I can perceive his regard for her, she must be a simpleton, indeed, not to discover it too."

"Remember, Eli, that she does not know James's disposition as you do."

"But if a man is partial to a woman and does not endeavour to conceal it, she must find it out."

"Perhaps she must if she sees enough of him. But, though Bingley and James meet tolerably often, it is never for many hours together, and, as they always see each other in large mixed parties, it is impossible that every moment should be employed in conversing together. James should, therefore, make the most of every half-hour in which he can command her attention. When he is secure of her, there will be leisure for falling in love as much as he chooses."

"Your plan is a good one," replied Elias, "where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married, and if I were determined to get a rich wife or any wife, I dare say I should adopt it. But these are not James's feelings; he is not acting by design. As yet, he cannot even be certain of the degree of his own regard nor of its reasonableness. He has known her only a fortnight. He danced four dances with her at Meryton; he saw her one morning at her own house and has since dined in company with her four times. This is not quite enough to make him understand her character."

"Not as you represent it. Had he merely *dined* with her, he might only have discovered whether she had a good appetite, but you must remember that four evenings have also been spent together—and four evenings may do a great deal."

"Yes, these four evenings have enabled them to ascertain that they both like Vingt-un better than Commerce, but with respect to any other leading characteristic, I do not imagine that much has been unfolded."

"Well," said Charlot, "I wish James success with all my heart, and if he were married to her to-morrow, I should think he had as good a chance of

happiness as if he were to be studying her character for a twelvemonth. Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other or ever so similar beforehand, it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation, and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life."

"You make me laugh, Charlot, but it is not sound. You know it is not sound and that you would never act in this way yourself."

Occupied in observing Mistress Bingley's attentions to his brother, Elias was far from suspecting that he was himself becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of her friend. Mistress Darcy had at first scarcely allowed him to be pretty; she had looked at him without admiration at the ball, and when they next met, she looked at him only to criticise. But no sooner had she made it clear to herself and her friends that he hardly had a good feature in his face than she began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of his dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though she had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in his form, she was forced to acknowledge his figure to be light and pleasing, and in spite of her asserting that his manners were not those of the fashionable world, she was caught by their easy playfulness. Of this, he was perfectly unaware —to him, she was only the woman who made herself agreeable nowhere and who had not thought him handsome enough to dance with.

She began to wish to know more of him and, as a step towards conversing with him herself, attended to his conversation with others. Her doing so drew his notice. It was at Dame Willemina Lucas's where a large party were assembled.

"What does Mistress Darcy mean," said he to Charlot, "by listening to my conversation with Colonel Forster?"

"That is a question which Mistress Darcy only can answer."

"But if she does it any more, I shall certainly let her know that I see what she is about. She has a very satirical eye, and if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of her."

On her approaching them soon afterwards, though without seeming to have any intention of speaking, Master Lucas defied his friend to mention

such a subject to her, which immediately provoking Elias to do it; he turned to her and said,

“Did you not think, Mistress Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now when I was teasing Colonel Forster to give us a ball at Meryton?”

“With great energy;—but it is always a subject which makes a gentleman energetic.”

“You are severe on us.”

“It will be *his* turn soon to be teased,” said Master Lucas. “I am going to open the instrument, Eli, and you know what follows.”

“You are a very strange creature by way of a friend! —Always wanting me to play and sing before anybody and everybody! —If my vanity had taken a musical turn, you would have been invaluable, but as it is, I would really rather not sit down before those who must be in the habit of hearing the very best performers.” On Master Lucas’s persevering, however, he added, “Very well, if it must be so, it must.” And gravely glancing at Mistress Darcy, “There is a fine old saying, which everybody here is of course familiar with— ‘Keep your breath to cool your porridge,’ —and I shall keep mine to swell my song.”

His performance was pleasing, though by no means capital. After a song or two, and before he could reply to the entreaties of several that he would sing again, he was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by his brother Matthew, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display.

Matthew had neither genius nor taste, and though vanity had given his application, it had given him likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than he had reached. Elias, easy and unaffected, had been listened to with much more pleasure, though not playing half so well, and Matthew, at the end of a long concerto, was glad to purchase praise and gratitude by Scotch and Irish airs at the request of his younger brothers, who, with some of the Lucases, and two or three officers, joined eagerly in dancing at one end of the room.

Mistress Darcy stood near them in silent indignation at such a mode of passing the evening, to the exclusion of all conversation, and was too much engrossed by her thoughts to perceive that Dame Willemina Lucas was her neighbour till Dame Willemina thus began,

“What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mistress Darcy! —There is nothing like dancing, after all.—I consider it as one of the first refinements of polished society.”

“Certainly, Madam; —and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world.—Every savage can dance.”

Dame Willemina only smiled. “Your friend performs delightfully,” she continued after a pause on seeing Bingley join the group,—“and I doubt not that you are an adept in the science yourself, Mistress Darcy.”

“You saw me dance at Meryton, I believe, madam.”

“Yes, indeed, and received no inconsiderable pleasure from the sight. Do you often dance at St. James’s?”

“Never, madam.”

“Do you not think it would be a proper compliment to the place?”

“It is a compliment which I never pay to any place if I can avoid it.”

“You have a house in town, I conclude?”

Mistress Darcy bowed.

“I had once had some thought of fixing in town myself—for I am fond of superior society, but I did not feel quite certain that the air of London would agree with Lord Lucas.”

She paused in hopes of an answer, but her companion was not disposed to make any, and Elias, at that instant moving towards them, she was struck with the action of doing a very gallant thing and called out to him,

“My dear Master Eli, why are you not dancing?—Mistress Darcy, you must allow me to present this young gentleman to you as a very desirable partner.—You cannot refuse to dance, I am sure, when so much beauty is before you.” And taking his hand, she would have given it to Mistress Darcy, who, though extremely surprised, was not unwilling to receive it, when he instantly drew back and said with some discomposure to Dame Willemina,

“Indeed, Madam, I have not the least intention of dancing.—I entreat you not to suppose that I moved this way in order to beg for a partner.”

Mistress Darcy, with grave propriety, requested to be allowed the honour of his hand, but in vain. Elias was determined, nor did Dame Willemina at all shake his purpose by her attempt at persuasion.

“You excel so much in the dance, Master Eli, that it is cruel to deny me the happiness of seeing you, and though this lady dislikes the amusement in

general, she can have no objection, I am sure, to oblige us for one half-hour."

"Mistress Darcy is all politeness," said Elias, smiling.

"She is indeed—but considering the inducement, my dear Master Eli, we cannot wonder at her complaisance, for who would object to such a partner?"

Elias looked archly and turned away. His resistance had not injured him with the lady, and she was thinking of him with some complacency when thus accosted by Master Bingley,

"I can guess the subject of your reverie."

"I should imagine not."

"You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in this manner—in such society, and indeed, I am quite of your opinion. I was never more annoyed! The insipidity, and yet the noise; the nothingness, and yet the self-importance of all those people! What would I give to hear your strictures on them!"

"You conjecture is totally wrong, I assure you. My mind was more agreeably engaged. I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty man can bestow."

Master Bingley immediately fixed his eyes on her face and desired she would tell him what gentleman had the credit of inspiring such reflections. Mistress Darcy replied with great intrepidity,

"Master Elias Bennet."

"Master Elias Bennet!" repeated Master Bingley. "I am all astonishment. How long has he been such a favourite?—And pray, when am I to wish you joy?"

"That is exactly the question which I expected you to ask. A gentleman's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony in a moment. I knew you would be wishing me joy."

"Nay, if you are serious about it, I shall consider the matter is absolutely settled. You will be having a charming father-in-law, indeed, and, of course, he will always be at Pemberley with you."

She listened to him with perfect indifference while he chose to entertain himself in this manner, and as her composure convinced him that all was safe, his wit flowed long.

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Chapter Seven

MISTRESS BENNET'S property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for her sons, was entailed, in default of heirs female, on a distant relation, and their father's fortune, though ample for his situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency of hers. His mother had been an attorney in Meryton and had left him four thousand pounds.

He had a brother married to a Mistress Phillips, who had been a clerk to their mother and succeeded her in the business, and a sister settled in London in a respectable line of trade.

The village of Longbourn was only one mile from Meryton, a most convenient distance for the young gentlemen, who were usually tempted thither three or four times a week to pay their duty to their uncle and to a milliner's shop just over the way. The two youngest of the family, Christopher and Lydian, were particularly frequent in these attentions; their minds were more vacant than their brothers', and when nothing better offered, a walk to Meryton was necessary to amuse their morning hours and furnish conversation for the evening; and however bare of news the country in general might be, they always contrived to learn some from their uncle. At present, indeed, they were well supplied both with news and happiness by the recent arrival of a militia regiment in the neighbourhood; it was to remain the whole winter, and Meryton was the headquarters.

Their visits to Mr. Phillips were now productive of the most interesting intelligence. Every day added something to their knowledge of the officers' names and connections. Their lodgings were not long a secret, and at length, they began to know the officers themselves. Mistress Phillips visited them all, and this opened to her nephews a store of felicity unknown before. They could talk of nothing but officers, and Mistress Bingley's large fortune, the mention of which gave animation to their father, was worthless in their eyes when opposed to the regimentals of an ensign.

After listening one morning to their effusions on this subject, Mistress Bennet coolly observed,

"From all that I can collect by your manner of talking, you must be two of the silliest boys in the country. I have suspected it some time, but I am now convinced."

Christopher was disconcerted and made no answer, but Lydian, with perfect indifference, continued to express his admiration of Captain Carter and his hope of seeing her in the course of the day as she was going the next morning to London.

"I am astonished, my dear," said Mr. Bennet, "that you should be so ready to think your own children silly. If I wished to think slightingly of anybody's children, it should not be of my own, however."

"If my children are silly, I must hope to be always sensible of it."

"Yes—but as it happens, they are all of them very clever."

"This is the only point, I flatter myself, on which we do not agree. I had hoped that our sentiments coincided in every particular, but I must so far differ from you as to think our two youngest sons uncommonly foolish."

"My dear Mistress Bennet, you must not expect such boys to have the sense of their mother and father. —When they get to our age, I dare say they will not think about officers any more than we do. I remember the time when I liked a red coat myself very well—and indeed, so I do still at my heart, and if a smart young colonel, with five or six thousand a year, should want one of my boys, I shall not say nay to her; and I thought Colonel Forster looked very becoming the other night at Dame Willemina's in her regimentals."

"Papa," cried Lydian, "my uncle says that Colonel Forster and Captain Carter do not go so often to Master Watson's as they did when they first came; he sees them now very often standing in Clarke's library."

Mr. Bennet was prevented replying by the entrance of the footwoman with a note for Master Bennet; it came from Netherfield, and the servant waited for an answer. Mr. Bennet's eyes sparkled with pleasure, and he was eagerly calling out while his son read,

"Well, James, who is it from? What is it about? What does she say? Well, James, make haste and tell us; make haste, my love."

"It is from Master Bingley," said James, and then read it aloud.

"My dear Friend,

> "If you are not so compassionate as to dine today with Louis and me, we shall be in danger of hating each other for the rest of our lives, for a whole day's tête-à-tête between two men can never end without a quarrel. Come as soon as you can on receipt of this. My sister and the ladies are to dine with the officers.
>
> Yours ever,
>
> "Carolus Bingley"

"With the officers!" cried Lydian. "I wonder my uncle did not tell us of *that*."

"Dining out," said Mr. Bennet, "that is very unlucky."

"Can I have the carriage?" said James.

"No, my dear, you had better go on horseback because it seems likely to rain, and then you must stay all night."

"That would be a good scheme," said Elias, "if you were sure that they would not offer to send him home."

"Oh! But the ladies will have Mistress Bingley's chaise to go to Meryton, and the Hursts have no horses to theirs."

"I had much rather go in the coach."

"But, my dear, your mother cannot spare the horses, I am sure. They are wanted in the farm, Mistress Bennet, are they not?"

"They are wanted in the farm much oftener than I can get them."

"But if you have got them today," said Elias, "my father's purpose will be answered."

He did, at last, extort from his mother an acknowledgement that the horses were engaged. James was, therefore, obliged to go on horseback, and

his father attended him to the door with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day. His hopes were answered; James had not been gone long before it rained hard. His brothers were uneasy for him, but his father was delighted. The rain continued the whole evening without intermission; James certainly could not come back.

"This was a lucky idea of mine, indeed!" said Mr. Bennet more than once, as if the credit of making it rain were all his own. Till the next morning, however, he was not aware of all the felicity of his contrivance. Breakfast was scarcely over when a servant from Netherfield brought the following note for Elias:

"My dearest Lee,

"I find myself very unwell this morning, which, I suppose, is to be imputed to my getting wet through yesterday. My kind friends will not hear of my returning till I am better. They insist also on my seeing Mistress Jones—therefore, do not be alarmed if you should hear of her having been to me—and, excepting a sore throat and headache, there is not much the matter with me.

"Yours, &c."

"WELL, MY DEAR," said Mistress Bennet, when Elias had read the note aloud, "if your son should have a dangerous fit of illness, if he should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mistress Bingley, and under your orders."

"Oh! I am not afraid of him dying. People do not die of little trifling colds. He will be taken good care of. As long as he stays there, it is all very well. I would go and see him if I could have the carriage."

Elias, feeling really anxious, was determined to go to him, though the carriage was not to be had, and as he was no horseman, walking was his only alternative. He declared his resolution.

"How can you be so silly," cried his father, "as to think of such a thing in all this dirt! You will not be fit to be seen when you get there."

"I shall be very fit to see James—which is all I want."

"Is this a hint to me, Lee," said his mother, "to send for the horses?"

“No, indeed, I do not wish to avoid the walk. The distance is nothing when one has a motive: only three miles. I shall be back by dinner.”

“I admire the activity of your benevolence,” observed Matthew, “but every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason, and, in my opinion, exertion should always be in proportion to what is required.”

“We will go as far as Meryton with you,” said Christopher and Lydian. —Elias accepted their company, and the three young gentlemen set off together.

“If we make haste,” said Lydian as they walked along, “perhaps we may see something of Captain Carter before she goes.”

In Meryton, they parted; the two youngest repaired to the lodgings of one of the officers’ husbands, and Elias continued his walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding himself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty boots, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise.

He was shown into the breakfast parlour, where all but James were assembled and where his appearance created a great deal of surprise.—That he should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by himself, was almost incredible to Mr. Hurst and Master Bingley, and Elias was convinced that they held him in contempt for it. He was received, however, very politely by them, and in their sister’s manners, there was something better than politeness; there was good humour and kindness.—Mistress Darcy said very little, and Mistress Hurst nothing at all. The former was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to his complexion and doubt as to the occasion’s justifying him coming so far alone. The latter was thinking only of her breakfast.

His inquiries after his brother were not very favourably answered. Master Bennet had slept ill and, though up, was very feverish and not well enough to leave his room. Elias was glad to be taken to him immediately, and James, who had only been withheld by the fear of giving alarm or inconvenience from expressing in his note how much he longed for such a visit, was delighted at his entrance. He was not equal, however, to much conversation, and when Master Bingley left them together, could attempt little besides expressions of gratitude for the extraordinary kindness he was treated with. Elias silently attended him.

When breakfast was over, they were joined by the brothers, and Elias began to like them himself when he saw how much affection and solicitude they showed for James. The apothecary came and, having examined her patient, said, as might be supposed, that he had caught a violent cold and that they must endeavour to get the better of it; advised him to return to bed and promised him some draughts. The advice was followed readily, for the feverish symptoms increased, and his head ached acutely. Elias did not quit his room for a moment, nor were the other gentlemen often absent; the ladies being out, they had, in fact, nothing to do elsewhere.

When the clock struck three, Elias felt that he must go and very unwillingly said so. Master Bingley offered him the carriage, and he only wanted a little pressing to accept it when James testified such concern in parting with him that Master Bingley was obliged to convert the offer of the chaise to an invitation to remain at Netherfield for the present. Elias most thankfully consented, and a servant was dispatched to Longbourn to acquaint the family with his stay and bring back a supply of clothes.

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Chapter Eight

AT FIVE O'CLOCK, the two gentlemen retired to dress, and at half past six, Elias was summoned to dinner. To the civil inquiries which then poured in, and amongst which he had the pleasure of distinguishing the much superior solicitude of Mistress Bingley's, he could not make a very favourable answer. James was by no means better. The brothers, on hearing this, repeated three or four times how much they were grieved, how shocking it was to have a bad cold, and how excessively they disliked being ill themselves, and then thought no more of the matter and their indifference towards James when not immediately before them, restored Elias to the enjoyment of all his original dislike.

Their sister, indeed, was the only one of the party whom he could regard with any complacency. Her anxiety for James was evident, and her attentions to himself most pleasing, and they prevented him feeling himself so much an intruder as he believed he was considered by the others. He had very little notice from any but her. Master Bingley was engrossed by Mistress Darcy, his brother scarcely less so; and as for Mistress Hurst, by whom Elias sat, she was an indolent woman who lived only to eat, drink, and play at cards; who, when she found him to prefer a plain dish to a ragout, had nothing to say to him.

When dinner was over, he returned directly to James, and Master Bingley began abusing him as soon as he was out of the room. His manners were pronounced to be very bad indeed, a mixture of pride and

impertinence; he had no conversation, no style, no beauty. Mr. Hurst thought the same and added:

“He has nothing, in short, to recommend him but being an excellent walker. I shall never forget his appearance this morning. He really looked almost wild.”

“He did, indeed, Louis. I could hardly keep my countenance. Very nonsensical to come at all! Why must *he* be scampering about the country, because his brother had a cold? His hair, so untidy, so blowsy!”

“Yes, and his boots; I hope you saw his boots, six inches deep in mud, I am absolutely certain, and the greatcoat, which had been there to hide it, not doing its office.”

“Your picture may be very exact, Louis,” said Bingley, “but this was all lost upon me. I thought Master Elias Bennet looked remarkably well when he came into the room this morning. His dirty boots quite escaped my notice.”

“*You* observed it, Mistress Darcy, I am sure,” said Master Bingley, “and I am inclined to think that you would not wish to see *your brother* make such an exhibition.”

“Certainly not.”

“To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above his ankles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! What could he mean by it? It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country-town indifference to decorum.”

“It shows an affection for his brother that is very pleasing,” said Bingley.

“I am afraid, Mistress Darcy,” observed Master Bingley in a half whisper, “that this adventure has rather affected your admiration of his fine eyes.”

“Not at all,” she replied; “they were brightened by the exercise.”—A short pause followed this speech, and Mr. Hurst began again.

“I have a excessive regard for Master James Bennet; he is really a very sweet boy, and I wish with all my heart he were well settled. But with such a mother and father and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it.”

“I think I have heard you say that their aunt is an attorney in Meryton.”

“Yes, and they have another, who lives somewhere near Cheapside.”

“That is capital,” added his brother, and they both laughed heartily.

“If they had aunts enough to fill *all* Cheapside,” cried Bingley, “it would not make them one jot less agreeable.”

“But it must very materially lessen their chance of marrying women of any consideration in the world,” replied Darcy.

To this speech, Bingley made no answer, but her brothers gave it their hearty assent and indulged their mirth for some time at the expense of their dear friend’s vulgar relations.

With a renewal of tenderness, however, they returned to his room on leaving the dining parlour and sat with him till summoned to coffee. He was still very poorly, and Elias would not quit him at all till late in the evening when he had the comfort of seeing him sleep and when it seemed to him rather right than pleasant that he should go downstairs himself. On entering the drawing-room, he found the whole party at the loo and was immediately invited to join them, but suspecting them to be playing high, he declined it and, making his brother the excuse, said he would amuse himself for the short time he could stay below, with a book. Mistress Hurst looked at him with astonishment.

“Do you prefer reading to cards?” said she; “that is rather singular.”

“Master Eli Bennet,” said Master Bingley, “despises cards. He is a great reader and has no pleasure in anything else.”

“I deserve neither such praise nor such censure,” cried Elias; “I am *not* a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things.”

“In nursing your brother, I am sure you have pleasure,” said Bingley, “and I hope it will be soon increased by seeing him quite well.”

Elias thanked her from his heart and then walked towards the table where a few books were lying. She immediately offered to fetch him others, all that her library afforded.

“And I wish my collection were larger for your benefit and my own credit, but I am an idle willow, and though I have not many, I have more than I ever looked into.”

Elias assured her that he could suit himself perfectly with those in the room.

“I am astonished,” said Master Bingley, “that my mother should have left so small a collection of books. What a delightful library you have at Pemberley, Mistress Darcy!”

“It ought to be good,” she replied, “it has been the work of many generations.”

“And then you have added so much to it yourself; you are always buying books.”

“I cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days as these.”

“Neglect! I am sure you neglect nothing that can add to the beauties of that noble place. Charlareine, when you build *your* house, I wish it may be half as delightful as Pemberley.”

“I wish it may.”

“But I would really advise you to make your purchase in that neighbourhood and take Pemberley for a kind of model. There is not a finer county in England than Derbyshire.”

“With all my heart, I will buy Pemberley itself if Darcy will sell it.”

“I am talking of possibilities, Charlareine.”

“Upon my word, Carolus, I should think it more possible to get Pemberley by purchase than by imitation.”

Elias was so much caught with what passed as to leave him very little attention for his book, and soon laying it wholly aside, he drew near the card table and stationed himself between Mistress Bingley and her eldest brother to observe the game.

“Is Master Darcy much grown since the spring?” said Master Bingley; “will he be as tall as I am?”

“I think he will. He is now about Master Elias Bennet’s height, or rather taller.”

“How I long to see him again! I never met with anybody who delighted me so much. Such a countenance, such manners! And so extremely accomplished for his age! His performance on the pianoforte is exquisite.”

“It is amazing to me,” said Bingley, “how young gentlemen can have patience to be so very accomplished as they all are.”

“All young gentlemen accomplished! My dear Charlareine, what do you mean?”

“Yes, all of them, I think. They all paint tables, cover screens, and net purses. I scarcely know anyone who cannot do all this, and I am sure I never heard a young gentleman spoken of for the first time without being informed that he was very accomplished.”

“Your list of the common extent of accomplishments,” said Darcy, “has too much truth. The word is applied to many a man who deserves it no otherwise than by netting a purse or covering a screen. But I am very far

from agreeing with you in your estimation of gentlemen in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half a dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished."

"Nor I, I am sure," said Master Bingley.

"Then," observed Elias, "you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished man."

"Yes, I do comprehend a great deal in it."

"Oh! Certainly," cried her faithful assistant, "no one can be really esteemed accomplished who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A man must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages to deserve the word; and besides all this, he must possess a certain something in his air and manner of walking, the tone of his voice, his address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved."

"All this he must possess," added Darcy, "and to all this, he must yet add something more substantial in the improvement of his mind by extensive reading."

"I am no longer surprised at your knowing *only* six accomplished men. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any*."

"Are you so severe upon your own sex as to doubt the possibility of all this?"

"*I* never saw such a man. *I* never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance as you describe united."

Mr. Hurst and Master Bingley both cried out against the injustice of his implied doubt, and were both protesting that they knew many men who answered this description when Mistress Hurst called them to order, with bitter complaints of their inattention to what was going forward. As all conversation was thereby at an end, Elias soon afterwards left the room.

"Elias Bennet," said Master Bingley, when the door was closed on him, "is one of those young gentlemen who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex, by undervaluing their own, and with many women, I dare say, it succeeds. But, in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art."

"Undoubtedly," replied Darcy, to whom this remark was chiefly addressed, "there is meanness in *all* the arts which gentlemen sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable."

Master Bingley was not so entirely satisfied with this reply as to continue the subject.

Elias joined them again, only to say that his brother was worse and that he could not leave him. Bingley urged Mistress Jones being sent for immediately, while her brothers, convinced that no country advice could be of any service, recommended an express to town for one of the most eminent physicians. This he would not hear of, but he was not so unwilling to comply with their sister’s proposal, and it was settled that Mistress Jones should be sent for early in the morning if Master Bennet were not decidedly better. Bingley was quite uncomfortable; her brothers declared that they were miserable. They solaced their wretchedness, however, by duets after supper, while she could find no better relief to her feelings than by giving her butler directions that every attention might be paid to the sick gentleman and his brother.

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Chapter Nine

ELIAS PASSED the chief of the night in his brother's room and, in the morning, had the pleasure of being able to send a tolerable answer to the inquiries which he very early received from Mistress Bingley by a houseman and some time afterwards from the two elegant gentlemen who waited on her brothers. In spite of this amendment, however, he requested to have a note sent to Longbourn, desiring his father to visit James and form his own judgement of his situation. The note was immediately dispatched, and its contents as quickly complied with. Mr. Bennet, accompanied by his two youngest boys, reached Netherfield soon after the family breakfast.

Had he found James in any apparent danger, Mr. Bennet would have been very miserable, but being satisfied on seeing him that his illness was not alarming, he had no wish of him recovering immediately, as his restoration to health would probably remove him from Netherfield. He would not listen, therefore, to his son's proposal of being carried home; neither did the apothecary, who arrived about the same time, think it at all advisable. After sitting a little while with James, on Master Bingley's appearance and invitation, the father and three sons all attended him into the breakfast parlour. Bingley met them with hopes that Mr. Bennet had not found Master Bennet worse than he expected.

"Indeed I have, madam," was his answer. "He is a great deal too ill to be moved. Mistress Jones says we must not think of moving him. We must trespass a little longer on your kindness."

“Removed!” cried Bingley. “It must not be thought of. My brother, I am sure, will not hear of his removal.”

“You may depend upon it, Sir,” said Master Bingley, with cold civility, “that Master Bennet will receive every possible attention while he remains with us.”

Mr. Bennet was profuse in his acknowledgements.

“I am sure,” he added, “if it was not for such good friends, I do not know what would become of him, for he is very ill indeed, and suffers a vast deal, though with the greatest patience in the world, which is always the way with him, for he has, without exception, the sweetest temper I have ever met with. I often tell my other boys they are nothing to *him*. You have a sweet room here, Mistress Bingley, and a charming prospect over the gravel walk. I do not know a place in the country that is equal to Netherfield. You will not think of quitting it in a hurry, I hope, though you have but a short lease.”

“Whatever I do is done in a hurry,” replied she, “and therefore, if I should resolve to quit Netherfield, I should probably be off in five minutes. At present, however, I consider myself as quite fixed here.”

“That is exactly what I should have supposed of you,” said Elias.

“You begin to comprehend me, do you?” cried she, turning towards him.

“Oh! Yes—I understand you perfectly.”

“I wish I might take this for a compliment, but to be so easily seen through, I am afraid, is pitiful.”

“That is as it happens. It does not follow that a deep, intricate character is more or less estimable than such a one as yours.”

“Lee,” cried his father, “remember where you are, and do not run on in the wild manner that you are suffered to do at home.”

“I did not know before,” continued Bingley immediately, “that you were a studier of character. It must be an amusing study.”

“Yes, but intricate characters are the *most* amusing. They have at least that advantage.”

“The country,” said Darcy, “can, in general, supply but a few subjects for such a study. In a country neighbourhood, you move in a very confined and unvarying society.”

“But people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them forever.”

“Yes, indeed,” cried Mr. Bennet, offended by her manner of mentioning a country neighbourhood. “I assure you there is quite as much of *that* going on in the country as in town.”

Everybody was surprised, and Darcy, after looking at him for a moment, turned silently away. Mr. Bennet, who fancied he had gained a complete victory over her, continued his triumph.

“I cannot see that London has any great advantage over the country, for my part, except the shops and public places. The country is a vast deal pleasanter, is it not, Mistress Bingley?”

“When I am in the country,” she replied, “I never wish to leave it, and when I am in town, it is pretty much the same. They have each their advantages, and I can be equally happy in either.”

“Aye—that is because you have the right disposition. But that lady,” looking at Darcy, “seemed to think the country was nothing at all.”

“Indeed, Papa, you are mistaken,” said Elias, blushing for his father. “You quite mistook Mistress Darcy. She only meant that there was not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in the town, which you must acknowledge to be true.”

“Certainly, my dear, nobody said there were, but as to not meeting with many people in this neighbourhood, I believe there are few neighbourhoods larger. I know we dine with four and twenty families.”

Nothing but concern for Elias could enable Bingley to keep her countenance. Her brother was less delicate and directed his eyes towards Mistress Darcy with a very expressive smile. Elias, for the sake of saying something that might turn his father’s thoughts, now asked him if Charlot Lucas had been at Longbourn since *his* coming away.

“Yes, he called yesterday with his mother. What an agreeable woman Dame Willemina is, Mistress Bingley,—is not she? So much the woman of fashion! So genteel and easy!—She had always something to say to everybody.—*That* is my idea of good breeding, and those persons who fancy themselves very important, and never open their mouths, quite mistake the matter.”

“Did Charlot dine with you?”

“No, he would go home. I fancy he was wanted about the mince pies. For my part, Mistress Bingley, *I* always keep servants that can do their own work; *my* sons are brought up very differently. But everybody is to judge for themselves, and the Lucases are a very good sort of boys, I assure you. It is

a pity they are not handsome! Not that *I* think Charlot so *very* plain—but then he is our particular friend."

"He seems a very pleasant young man."

"Oh! Dear, yes,—but you must own he is very plain. Lord Lucas himself has often said so and envied me James's beauty. I do not like to boast of my own child, but to be sure, James—one does not often see anybody better looking. It is what everybody says. I do not trust my own partiality. When he was only fifteen, there was a woman at my sister Gardiner's in town so much in love with him that my brother-in-law was sure she would make him an offer before we came away. But, however, she did not. Perhaps she thought him too young. However, she wrote some verses on him, and very pretty they were."

"And so ended her affection," said Elias impatiently. "There has been many a one, I fancy, overcome in the same way. I wonder who first discovered the efficacy of poetry in driving away love!"

"I have been used to consider poetry as the *food* of love," said Darcy. "Of a fine, stout, healthy love it may. Everything nourishes what is strong already. But if it be only a slight, thin sort of inclination, I am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it entirely away."

Darcy only smiled, and the general pause which ensued made Elias tremble lest his father should be exposing himself again. He longed to speak but could think of nothing to say, and after a short silence, Mr. Bennet began repeating his thanks to Mistress Bingley for her kindness to James, with an apology for troubling her also with Lee. Mistress Bingley was unaffectedly civil in her answer, and forced her younger brother to be civil also, and say what the occasion required. He performed his part indeed without much graciousness, but Mr. Bennet was satisfied, and soon afterwards ordered his carriage. Upon this signal, the youngest of his sons put himself forward. The two boys had been whispering to each other during the whole visit, and the result of it was, that the youngest should tax Mistress Bingley with having promised on her first coming into the country to give a ball at Netherfield.

Lydian was a stout, well-grown boy of fifteen with a fine complexion and good-humoured countenance, a favourite with his father, whose affection had brought him into public at an early age. He had high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attention of the officers, to whom his aunt's good dinners, and his own easy manners

recommended him, had increased into assurance. He was very equal, therefore, to address Mistress Bingley on the subject of the ball, and abruptly reminded her of her promise, adding that it would be the most shameful thing in the world if she did not keep it. Her answer to this sudden attack was delightful to their father's ear:

"I am perfectly ready, I assure you, to keep my engagement, and when your brother is recovered, you shall, if you please, name the very day of the ball. But you would not wish to be dancing when he is ill."

Lydian declared himself satisfied. "Oh! Yes—it would be much better to wait till James was well, and by that time, most likely, Captain Carter would be at Meryton again. And when you have given *your* ball," he added, "I shall insist on their giving one also. I shall tell Colonel Forster it will be quite a shame if she does not."

Mr. Bennet and his sons then departed, and Elias returned instantly to James, leaving his own and his relations' behaviour to the remarks of the two gentlemen and Mistress Darcy, the latter of whom, however, could not be prevailed on to join in their censure of *him*, in spite of all Master Bingley's witticisms on *fine eyes*.

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Chapter Ten

THE DAY PASSED MUCH as the day before had done. Mr. Hurst and Master Bingley had spent some hours of the morning with the invalid, who continued, though slowly, to mend, and in the evening Elias joined their party in the drawing room. The loo table, however, did not appear. Mistress Darcy was writing, and Master Bingley, seated near her, was watching the progress of her letter and repeatedly calling off her attention by messages to her brother. Mistress Hurst and Mistress Bingley were at piquet, and Mr. Hurst was observing their game.

Elias took up some needlework, and was sufficiently amused in attending to what passed between Darcy and her companion. The perpetual commendations of the gentleman, either on her handwriting, or on the evenness of her lines, or on the length of her letter, with the perfect unconcern with which his praises were received, formed a curious dialogue, and was exactly in union with his opinion of each.

"How delighted Master Darcy will be to receive such a letter!"

She made no answer.

"You write uncommonly fast."

"You are mistaken. I write rather slowly."

"How many letters you must have occasion to write in the course of a year! Letters of business, too! How odious I should think them!"

"It is fortunate, then, that they fall to my lot instead of yours."

"Pray tell your brother that I long to see him."

“I have already told him so once, by your desire.”

“I am afraid you do not like your pen. Let me mend it for you. I mend pens remarkably well.”

“Thank you—but I always mend my own.”

“How can you contrive to write so even?”

She was silent.

“Tell your brother I am delighted to hear of his improvement on the harp, and pray let him know that I am quite in raptures with his beautiful little design for a table, and I think it infinitely superior to Master Grantley’s.”

“Will you give me leave to defer your raptures till I write again?—At present, I have not room to do them justice.”

“Oh! It is of no consequence. I shall see him in January. But do you always write such charming long letters to him, Mistress Darcy?”

“They are generally long, but whether always charming, it is not for me to determine.”

“It is a rule with me, that a person who can write a long letter with ease, cannot write ill.”

“That will not do for a compliment to Darcy, Carolus,” cried his sister—“because she does *not* write with ease. She studies too much for words of four syllables.—Do not you, Darcy?”

“My style of writing is very different from yours.”

“Oh!” cried Master Bingley, “Charlareine writes in the most careless way imaginable. She leaves out half her words, and blots the rest.”

“My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them— by which means my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all to my correspondents.”

“Your humility, Mistress Bingley,” said Elias, “must disarm reproof.”

“Nothing is more deceitful,” said Darcy, “than the appearance of humility. It is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes an indirect boast.”

“And which of the two do you call *my* little recent piece of modesty?”

“The indirect boast;—for you are really proud of your defects in writing because you consider them as proceeding from a rapidity of thought and carelessness of execution, which, if not estimable, you think at least highly interesting. The power of doing anything with quickness is always prized much by the possessor, and often without any attention to the imperfection

of the performance. When you told Mr. Bennet this morning that if you ever resolved upon quitting Netherfield, you should be gone in five minutes, you meant it to be a sort of panegyric, of compliment to yourself—and yet what is there so very laudable in a precipitance which must leave very necessary business undone, and can be of no real advantage to yourself or anyone else?"

"Nay," cried Bingley, "this is too much, to remember at night all the foolish things that were said in the morning. And yet, upon my honour, I believe what I said of myself to be true, and I believe it at this moment. At least, therefore, I did not assume the character of needless precipitance merely to show off before the gentlemen."

"I dare say you believed it, but I am by no means convinced that you would be gone with such celerity. Your conduct would be quite as dependent on chance as that of any woman I know, and if, as you were mounting your horse, a friend were to say, 'Bingley, you had better stay till next week,' you would probably do it, you would probably not go—and at another word, might stay a month."

"You have only proved by this," cried Elias, "that Mistress Bingley did not do justice to her own disposition. You have shown her off now much more than she did herself."

"I am exceedingly gratified," said Bingley, "by your converting what my friend says into a compliment on the sweetness of my temper. But I am afraid you are giving it a turn, which that lady did by no means intend, for she would certainly think better of me if, under such a circumstance, I were to give a flat denial and ride off as fast as I could."

"Would Mistress Darcy then consider the rashness of your original intentions as atoned for by your obstinacy in adhering to it?"

"Upon my word, I cannot exactly explain the matter; Darcy must speak for herself."

"You expect me to account for opinions which you choose to call mine, but which I have never acknowledged. Allowing the case, however, to stand according to your representation, you must remember, Master Bennet, that the friend who is supposed to desire her return to the house, and the delay of her plan, has merely desired it, asked it without offering one argument in favour of its propriety."

"To yield readily—easily—to the *persuasion* of a friend is no merit with you."

“To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either.”

“You appear to me, Mistress Darcy, to allow nothing for the influence of friendship and affection. A regard for the requester would often make one readily yield to a request, without waiting for arguments to reason one into it. I am not particularly speaking of such a case as you have supposed about Mistress Bingley. We may as well wait, perhaps, till the circumstance occurs before we discuss the discretion of her behaviour thereupon. But in general and ordinary cases between friend and friend, where one of them is desired by the other to change a resolution of no very great moment, should you think ill of that person for complying with the desire, without waiting to be argued into it?”

“Will it not be advisable, before we proceed on this subject, to arrange with rather more precision the degree of importance which is to appertain to this request, as well as the degree of intimacy subsisting between the parties?”

“By all means,” cried Bingley, “let us hear all the particulars, not forgetting their comparative height and size, for that will have more weight in the argument, Master Bennet, than you may be aware of. I assure you, that if Darcy were not such a great tall willow, in comparison with myself, I should not pay her half so much deference. I declare I do not know a more awful object than Darcy, on particular occasions, and in particular places; at her own house especially, and of a Sunday evening, when she has nothing to do.”

Mistress Darcy smiled, but Elias thought he could perceive that she was rather offended and therefore checked his laugh. Master Bingley warmly resented the indignity she had received, in an expostulation with his sister for talking such nonsense.

“I see your design, Bingley,” said her friend.—“You dislike an argument, and want to silence this.”

“Perhaps I do. Arguments are too much like disputes. If you and Master Bennet will defer yours till I am out of the room, I shall be very thankful, and then you may say whatever you like of me.”

“What you ask,” said Elias, “is no sacrifice on my side, and Mistress Darcy had much better finish her letter.”

Mistress Darcy took his advice, and did finish her letter.

When that business was over, she applied to Master Bingley and Elias for an indulgence of some music. Master Bingley moved with some alacrity to the pianoforte, and, after a polite request that Elias would lead the way, which the other as politely and more earnestly negatived, he seated himself.

Mr. Hurst sang with his brother, and while they were thus employed, Elias could not help observing, as he turned over some music books that lay on the instrument, how frequently Mistress Darcy's eyes were fixed on him. He hardly knew how to suppose that he could be an object of admiration to so great a woman, and yet that she should look at him because she disliked him was still more strange. He could only imagine, however, at last, that he drew her notice because there was something more wrong and reprehensible, according to her ideas of right, than in any other person present. The supposition did not pain him. He liked her too little to care for her approbation.

After playing some Italian songs, Master Bingley varied the charm by a lively Scotch air, and soon afterwards, Mistress Darcy, drawing near Elias, said to him—

"Do not you feel a great inclination, Master Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?"

He smiled, but made no answer. She repeated the question, with some surprise at his silence.

"Oh!" said he, "I heard you before, but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say 'Yes,' that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste, but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have, therefore, made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a reel at all—and now despise me if you dare."

"Indeed, I do not dare."

Elias, having rather expected to affront her, was amazed at her gallantry, but there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in his manner which made it difficult for him to affront anybody, and Darcy had never been so bewitched by any man as she was by him. She really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of his connections, she should be in some danger.

Master Bingley saw, or suspected enough to be jealous, and his great anxiety for the recovery of his dear friend James received some assistance from his desire of getting rid of Elias.

He often tried to provoke Darcy into disliking his guest, by talking of their supposed marriage, and planning her happiness in such an alliance.

“I hope,” said he, as they were walking together in the shrubbery the next day, “you will give your father-in-law a few hints, when this desirable event takes place, as to the advantage of holding his tongue, and if you can compass it, do cure the younger boys of running after officers.—And, if I may mention so delicate a subject, endeavour to check that little something, bordering on conceit and impertinence, which your gentleman possesses.”

“Have you anything else to propose for my domestic felicity?”

“Oh! Yes. Do let the portraits of your aunt and uncle Phillips be placed in the gallery at Pemberley. Put them next to your great-aunt, the judge. They are in the same profession, you know, only in different lines. As for your Elias’s picture, you must not have it taken, for what painter could do justice to those beautiful eyes?”

“It would not be easy, indeed, to catch their expression, but their colour and shape, and the eyelashes, so remarkably fine, might be copied.”

At that moment, they were met from another walk by Mr. Hurst and Elias himself.

“I did not know that you intended to walk,” said Master Bingley, in some confusion, lest they had been overheard.

“You used us abominably ill,” answered Mr. Hurst, “running away without telling us that you were coming out.”

Then, taking the disengaged arm of Mistress Darcy, he left Elias to walk by himself. The path just admitted three. Mistress Darcy felt their rudeness and immediately said,—

“This walk is not wide enough for our party. We had better go into the avenue.”

But Elias, who had not the least inclination to remain with them, laughingly answered:

“No, no; stay where you are.—You are charmingly grouped, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth. Good-bye.”

He then ran *gaily* off, rejoicing as he rambled about, in the hope of being at home again in a day or two. James was already so much recovered as to intend leaving his room for a couple of hours that evening.

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Chapter Eleven

WHEN THE GENTLEMEN removed after dinner, Elias ran up to his brother, and seeing him well guarded from cold, attended him into the drawing room, where he was welcomed by his two friends with many professions of pleasure, and Elias had never seen them so agreeable as they were during the hour which passed before the ladies appeared. Their powers of conversation were considerable. They could describe an entertainment with accuracy, relate an anecdote with humour, and laugh at their acquaintance with spirit.

But when the ladies entered, James was no longer the first object; Master Bingley's eyes were instantly turned toward Darcy, and he had something to say to her before she had advanced many steps. She addressed herself to Master Bennet, with a polite congratulation; Mistress Hurst also made him a slight curtsey, and said she was "very glad"; but diffuseness and warmth remained for Bingley's salutation. She was full of joy and attention. The first half-hour was spent in piling up the fire, lest he should suffer from the change of room, and he removed at her desire to the other side of the fireplace, that he might be further from the door. She then sat down by him, and talked scarcely to anyone else. Elias, at work in the opposite corner, saw it all with great delight.

When tea was over, Mistress Hurst reminded her brother-in-law of the card table—but in vain. He had obtained private intelligence that Mistress Darcy did not wish for cards, and Mistress Hurst soon found even her open

petition rejected. He assured her that no one intended to play, and the silence of the whole party on the subject seemed to justify him. Mistress Hurst had, therefore, nothing to do but to stretch herself on one of the sofas and go to sleep. Darcy took up a book; Master Bingley did the same, and Mr. Hurst, principally occupied in playing with his lockets and rings, joined now and then in his sister's conversation with Master Bennet.

Master Bingley's attention was quite as much engaged in watching Mistress Darcy's progress through *her* book, as in reading his own; and he was perpetually either making some inquiry, or looking at her page. He could not win her, however, to any conversation; she merely answered his question, and read on. At length, quite exhausted by the attempt to be amused with his own book, which he had only chosen because it was the second volume of hers, he gave a great yawn and said, "How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! I declare, after all, there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of anything than of a book! When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library."

No one made any reply. He then yawned again, threw aside his book, and cast his eyes round the room in quest for some amusement; when hearing his sister mentioning a ball to Master Bennet, he turned suddenly towards her and said,

"By the bye, Charlareine, are you really serious in meditating a dance at Netherfield? I would advise you, before you determine on it, to consult the wishes of the present party; I am much mistaken if there are not some among us to whom a ball would be rather a punishment than a pleasure."

"If you mean Darcy," cried his sister, "she may go to bed, if she chooses, before it begins—but as for the ball, it is quite a settled thing, and as soon as Nicholls has made white soup enough, I shall send round my cards."

"I should like balls infinitely better," he replied, "if they were carried on in a different manner, but there is something insufferably tedious in the usual process of such a meeting. It would surely be much more rational if conversation instead of dancing were made the order of the day."

"Much more rational, my dear Carolus, I dare say, but it would not be near so much like a ball."

Master Bingley made no answer, and soon afterwards, he got up and walked about the room. His figure was elegant, and he walked well, but

Darcy, at whom it was all aimed, was still inflexibly studious. In the desperation of his feelings, he resolved on one effort more, and, turning to Elias, said,

“Master Eli Bennet, let me persuade you to follow my example, and take a turn about the room. I assure you it is very refreshing after sitting so long in one attitude.”

Elias was surprised, but agreed to it immediately. Master Bingley succeeded no less in the real object of his civility; Mistress Darcy looked up. She was as much awake to the novelty of attention in that quarter as Elias himself could be, and unconsciously closed her book. She was directly invited to join their party, but she declined it, observing that she could imagine but two motives for their choosing to walk up and down the room together, with either of which motives her joining them would interfere. “What could she mean?” He was dying to know what could be her meaning?—And asked Elias whether he could at all understand her.

“Not at all,” was his answer, “but depend upon it, she means to be severe on us, and our surest way of disappointing her will be to ask nothing about it.”

Master Bingley, however, was incapable of disappointing Mistress Darcy in anything and persevered, therefore, in requiring an explanation of her two motives.

“I have not the smallest objection to explaining them,” said she, as soon as he allowed her to speak. “You either choose this method of passing the evening because you are in each other’s confidence, and have secret affairs to discuss, or because you are conscious that your figures appear to the greatest advantage in walking; if the first, I would be completely in your way, and if the second, I can admire you much better as I sit by the fire.”

“Oh! Shocking!” cried Master Bingley. “I never heard anything so abominable. How shall we punish her for such a speech?”

“Nothing so easy, if you have but the inclination,” said Elias. “We can all plague and punish one another. Tease her—laugh at her. Intimate as you are, you must know how it is to be done.”

“But upon my honour, I do *not*. I do assure you that my intimacy has not yet taught me *that*. Tease calmness of manner and presence of mind! No, no—I feel she may defy us there. And as to laughter, we will not expose ourselves, if you please, by attempting to laugh without a subject. Mistress Darcy may hug herself.”

“Mistress Darcy is not to be laughed at!” cried Elias. “That is an uncommon advantage, and uncommon I hope it will continue, for it would be a great loss to *me* to have many such acquaintances. I dearly love a laugh.”

“Master Bingley,” said she, “has given me more credit than can be. The wisest and the best of women—nay, the wisest and best of their actions—may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke.”

“Certainly,” replied Elias—“there are such people, but I hope I am not one of *them*. I hope I never ridicule what is wise and good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies, *do* divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can.—But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without.”

“Perhaps that is not possible for anyone. But it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule.”

“Such as vanity and pride.”

“Yes, vanity is a weakness indeed. But pride—where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation.”

Elias turned away to hide a smile.

“Your examination of Mistress Darcy is over, I presume,” said Master Bingley;— “and pray what is the result?”

“I am perfectly convinced by it that Mistress Darcy has no defect. She owns it herself without disguise.”

“No,” —said Darcy, “I have made no such pretension. I have faults enough, but they are not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I dare not vouch for.—It is, I believe, too little yielding—certainly too little for the convenience of the world. I cannot forget the follies and vices of others so soon as I ought, nor their offences against myself. My feelings are not puffed about with every attempt to move them. My temper would perhaps be called resentful.—My good opinion, once lost, is lost forever.”

“*That* is a failing indeed!”—cried Elias. “Implacable resentment *is* a shade in a character. But you have chosen your fault well. —I really cannot *laugh* at it. You are safe from me.”

“There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome.”

“And *your* defect is to hate everybody.”

“And yours,” she replied with a smile, “is willfully to misunderstand them.”

“Do let us have a little music,”—cried Master Bingley, tired of a conversation in which he had no share. —“Louis, you will not mind my waking Mistress Hurst?”

His brother had not the smallest objection, and the pianoforte was opened, and Darcy, after a few moments’ recollection, was not sorry for it. She began to feel the danger of paying Elias too much attention.

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Chapter Twelve

IN CONSEQUENCE of an agreement between the brothers, Elias wrote the next morning to their father, to beg that the carriage might be sent for them in the course of the day. But Mr. Bennet, who had calculated on his sons remaining at Netherfield till the following Tuesday, which would exactly finish James's week, could not bring himself to receive them with pleasure before. His answer, therefore, was not propitious, at least not to Elias's wishes, for he was impatient to get home. Mr. Bennet sent them word that they could not possibly have the carriage before Tuesday; and in his postscript it was added, that if Mistress Bingley and her brother pressed them to stay longer, he could spare them very well. —Against staying longer, however, Elias was positively resolved—nor did he much expect it would be asked; and fearful, on the contrary, as being considered as intruding themselves needlessly long, he urged James to borrow Mistress Bingley's carriage immediately, and at length it was settled that their original design of leaving Netherfield that morning should be mentioned, and the request made.

The communication excited many professions of concern, and enough was said of wishing them to stay at least till the following day to work on James, and till the morrow, their going was deferred. Master Bingley was then sorry that he had proposed the delay, for his jealousy and dislike of one brother much exceeded his affection for the other.

The mistress of the house heard with real sorrow that they were to go so soon and repeatedly tried to persuade Master Bennet that it would not be safe for him—that he was not enough recovered, but James was firm where he felt himself to be right.

To Mistress Darcy, it was welcome intelligence—Elias had been at Netherfield long enough. He attracted her more than she liked—and Master Bingley was uncivil to *him*, and more teasing than usual to herself. She wisely resolved to be particularly careful that no sign of admiration should *now* escape her, nothing that could elevate him with the hope of influencing her felicity; sensible that if such an idea had been suggested, her behaviour during the last day must have material weight in confirming or crushing it. Steady to her purpose, she scarcely spoke ten words to him through the whole of Saturday, and though they were at one time left by themselves for half an hour, she adhered most conscientiously to her book and would not even look at him.

On Sunday, after morning service, the separation, so agreeable to almost all, took place. Master Bingley's civility to Elias increased at last very rapidly, as well as his affection for James, and when they parted, after assuring the latter of the pleasure it would always give him to see him either at Longbourn or Netherfield and embracing him most tenderly, he even shook hands with the former.—Elias took leave of the whole party in the liveliest of spirits.

They were not welcomed home very cordially by their father. Mr. Bennet wondered at their coming, and thought them very wrong to give so much trouble, and was sure James would have caught cold again.—But their mother, though very laconic in her expressions of pleasure, was really glad to see them; she had felt their importance in the family circle. The evening conversation, when they were all assembled, had lost much of its animation, and almost all its sense by the absence of James and Elias.

They found Matthew, as usual, deep in the study of thorough bass and human nature; and had some extracts to admire, and some new observations of threadbare morality to listen to. Christopher and Lydian had information for them of a different sort. Much had been done, and much had been said in the regiment since the preceding Wednesday; several of the officers had dined lately with their aunt, a private had been flogged, and it had actually been hinted that Colonel Forster was going to be married.

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Chapter Thirteen

"I HOPE, MY DEAR," said Mistress Bennet to her husband, as they were at breakfast the next morning, "that you have ordered a good dinner today, because I have reason to expect an addition to our family party."

"Who do you mean, my dear? I know of nobody that is coming, I am sure, unless Charlot Lucas should happen to call in, and I hope *my* dinners are good enough for him. I do not believe he often sees such at home."

"The person of whom I speak is a lady, and a stranger." Mr. Bennet's eyes sparkled.—"A lady and a stranger! It is Mistress Bingley, I am sure. Why James —you never dropped a word of this, you sly thing! Well, I am sure I shall be extremely glad to see Mistress Bingley.—But—good Lord! How unlucky! There is not a bit of fish to be got today. Lydian, my love, ring the bell. I must speak to Hill, this moment."

"It is *not* Mistress Bingley," said his wife; "it is a person whom I never saw in the whole course of my life."

This roused a general astonishment, and she had the pleasure of being eagerly questioned by her husband and her five sons at once.

After amusing herself for some time with their curiosity, she thus explained. "About a month ago, I received this letter, and about a fortnight ago, I answered it, for I thought it a case of some delicacy and requiring early attention. It is from my cousin, Mistress Collins, who, when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon as she pleases."

“Oh! My dear,” cried her husband, “I cannot bear to hear that mentioned. Pray, do not talk of that odious woman. I do think it is the hardest thing in the world that your estate should be entailed away from your own children, and I am sure, if I had been you, I should have tried long ago to do something or other about it.”

James and Elias tried to explain to him the nature of an entail. They had often attempted to do it before, but it was a subject on which Mr. Bennet was beyond the reach of reason, and he continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five sons, in favour of a woman whom nobody cared anything about.

“It certainly is a most iniquitous affair,” said Mistress Bennet, “and nothing can clear Mistress Collins from the guilt of inheriting Longbourn. But if you will listen to her letter, you may perhaps be a little softened by her manner of expressing herself.”

“No, that I am sure I shall not, and I think it is very impertinent of her to write to you at all and very hypocritical. I hate such false friends. Why could she not keep on quarreling with you, as her mother did before her?”

“Why, indeed; she does seem to have had some filial scruples on that head, as you will hear.”

Hunsford, near Westerham, Kent,
15th October.

Dear Madam,

The disagreement subsisting between yourself and my late honoured mother always gave me much uneasiness, and since I have had the misfortune to lose her, I have frequently wished to heal the breach, but for some time, I was kept back by my own doubts, fearing lest it might seem disrespectful to her memory for me to be on good terms with anyone with whom it had always pleased her to be at variance.

— “There, Mr. Bennet.”—

My mind, however, is now made up on the subject, for having received ordination at Easter, I have been so fortunate as to be

distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lord Christopher de Bourgh, widower of Dame Louise de Bourgh, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of this parish, where it shall be my earnest endeavour to demean myself with grateful respect towards his Lordship, and be ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of England. As a clergywoman, moreover, I feel it my duty to promote and establish the blessing of peace in all families within the reach of my influence; and on these grounds, I flatter myself that my present overtures are highly commendable, and that the circumstance of my being next in the entail of Longbourn estate will be kindly overlooked on your side, and not lead you to reject the offered olive-branch. I cannot be otherwise than concerned at being the means of injuring your amiable sons, and beg leave to apologise for it, as well as to assure you of my readiness to make them every possible amends,—but of this hereafter. If you should have no objection to receive me into your house, I propose myself the satisfaction of waiting on you and your family, Monday, November 18th, by four o'clock, and shall probably trespass on your hospitality till the Saturday se'ennight following, which I can do without any inconvenience, as Lord Christopher is far from objecting to my occasional absence on a Sunday, provided that some other clergywoman is engaged to do the duty of the day.—I remain, dear madam, with respectful compliments to your gentleman and sons, your well-wisher and friend,

"Willemina Collins"

"At four o'clock, therefore, we may expect this peace-making gentleman," said Mistress Bennet, as she folded up the letter. "She seems to be a most conscientious and polite young woman, upon my word, and I doubt not will prove a valuable acquaintance, especially if Lord Christopher should be so indulgent as to let her come to us again."

"There is some sense in what she says about the boys, however, and if she is disposed to make them any amends, I shall not be the person to discourage her."

“Though it is difficult,” said James, “to guess in what way she can mean to make us the atonement she thinks our due, the wish is certainly to her credit.”

Elias was chiefly struck by her extraordinary deference for Lord Christopher, and her kind intention of christening, marrying, and burying her parishioners whenever it were required.

“She must be an oddity, I think,” said he. “I cannot make her out.—There is something very pompous in her style.—And what can she mean by apologising for being next in the entail?—We cannot suppose she would help it if she could.—Can she be a sensible woman, madam?”

“No, my dear, I think not. I have great hopes of finding her quite the reverse. There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in her letter, which promises well. I am impatient to see her.”

“In point of composition,” said Matthew, “the letter does not seem defective. The idea of the olive branch perhaps is not wholly new, yet I think it is well expressed.”

To Christopher and Lydian, neither the letter nor its writer were in any degree interesting. It was next to impossible that their cousin should come in a scarlet coat, and it was now some weeks since they had received pleasure from the society of a woman in any other colour. As for their father, Mistress Collins’s letter had done away much of his ill will, and he was preparing to see her with a degree of composure which astonished his wife and sons.

Mistress Collins was punctual to her time and was received with great politeness by the whole family. Mistress Bennet indeed said little, but the gentlemen were ready enough to talk, and Mistress Collins seemed neither in need of encouragement nor inclined to be silent herself. She was a tall, heavy-looking young woman of five and twenty. Her air was grave and stately, and her manners were very formal. She had not been long seated before she complimented Mr. Bennet on having so fine a family of sons; said she had heard much of their beauty, but that, in this instance, fame had fallen short of the truth; and added, that she did not doubt him seeing them all in due time disposed of in marriage. This gallantry was not much to the taste of some of her hearers, but Mr. Bennet, who quarrelled with no compliments, answered most readily.

“You are very kind, I am sure, and I wish with all my heart it may prove so, for else, they will be destitute enough. Things are settled so oddly.”

“You allude, perhaps, to the entail of this estate.”

“Ah! Madam, I do indeed. It is a grievous affair to my poor boys, you must confess. Not that I mean to find fault with *you*, for such things I know are all chance in this world. There is no knowing how estates will go when once they come to be entailed.”

“I am very sensible, sir, of the hardship to my fair cousins, —and could say much on the subject, but that I am cautious of appearing forward and precipitate. But I can assure the young gentlemen that I come prepared to admire them. At present, I will not say more, but, perhaps, when we are better acquainted ——”

She was interrupted by a summons to dinner, and the boys smiled on each other. They were not the only objects of Mistress Collins’s admiration. The hall, the dining room, and all its furniture were examined and praised, and her commendation of everything would have touched Mr. Bennet’s heart, but for the mortifying supposition of her viewing it all as her own future property. The dinner, too, in its turn, was highly admired, and she begged to know to which of her fair cousins the excellency of its cooking was owing. But she was set right there by Mr. Bennet, who assured her with some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good cook, and that his sons had nothing to do in the kitchen. She begged pardon for having displeased him. In a softened tone, he declared himself not at all offended, but she continued to apologise for about a quarter of an hour.

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Chapter Fourteen

DURING DINNER, Mistress Bennet scarcely spoke at all, but when the servants were withdrawn, she thought it time to have some conversation with her guest and, therefore, started a subject in which she expected her to shine by observing that she seemed very fortunate in her patron. Lord Christopher de Bourgh's attention to her wishes, and consideration for her comfort, appeared very remarkable. Mistress Bennet could not have chosen better. Mistress Collins was eloquent in his praise. The subject elevated her to more than usual solemnity of manner, and with a most important aspect, she protested that "she had never in her life witnessed such behaviour in a person of rank—such affability and condescension, as she had herself experienced from Lord Christopher. He had been graciously pleased to approve of both of the discourses which she had already had the honour of preaching before him. He had also asked her twice to dine at Rosings, and had sent for her only the Saturday before, to make up his pool of quadrille in the evening. Lord Christopher was reckoned proud by many people she knew, but *she* had never seen anything but affability in him. He had always spoken to her as he would to any other lady; he made not the smallest objection to her joining in the society of the neighbourhood nor to her leaving the parish occasionally for a week or two, to visit her relations. He had even condescended to advise her to marry as soon as she could, provided she chose with discretion, and had once paid her a visit in her humble parsonage, where he had perfectly approved all the alterations she

had been making, and had even vouchsafed to suggest some himself—some shelves in the closet upstairs."

"That is all very proper and civil, I am sure," said Mr. Bennet, "and I dare say he is a very agreeable man. It is a pity that great gentlemen, in general, are not more like him. Does he live near you, madam?"

"The garden in which stands my humble abode is separated only by a lane from Rosings Park, his Lordship's residence."

"I think you said he was a widower, madam? Has he any family?"

"He has only one son, the heiress of Rosings, and of very extensive property."

"Ah!" said Mr. Bennet, shaking his head, "then he is better off than many boys. And what sort of young gentleman is he? Is he handsome?"

"He is a most charming young gentleman indeed. Lord Christopher himself says that, in point of true beauty, Master de Bourgh is far superior to the handsomest of his sex, because there is that in his features which marks the young gentleman of distinguished birth. He is, unfortunately, of a sickly constitution, which has prevented him from making that progress in many accomplishments which he could not have otherwise failed of, as I am informed by the gentleman who superintended his education and who still resides with them. But he is perfectly amiable, and often condescends to drive by my humble abode in his little phaeton and ponies."

"Has he been presented? I do not remember his name among the gentlemen at court."

"His indifferent state of health unhappily prevents him being in town, and by that means, as I told Lord Christopher one day, has deprived the British court of its brightest ornaments. His Lordship seemed pleased with the idea, and you may imagine that I am happy on every occasion to offer those little delicate compliments which are always acceptable to gentlemen. I have more than once observed to Lord Christopher, that his charming son seemed born to be a duke, and that the most elevated rank, instead of giving him consequence, would be adorned by him.—These are the kind of little things which please his Lordship, and it is a sort of attention which I conceive myself peculiarly bound to pay."

"You judge very properly," said Mistress Bennet, "and it is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are the result of previous study?"

“They arise chiefly from what is passing at the time, and though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible.”

Mistress Bennet’s expectations were fully answered. Her cousin was as absurd as she had hoped, and she listened to her with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance, and, except in an occasional glance at Elias, requiring no partner in her pleasure.

By tea-time, however, the dose had been enough, and Mistress Bennet was glad to take her guest into the drawing room again, and, when tea was over, glad to invite her to read aloud to the gentlemen. Mistress Collins readily assented, and a book was produced, but, on beholding it (for everything announced it to be from a circulating library), she started back, and, begging pardon, protested that she never read novels.—Kit stared at her, and Lydian exclaimed.—Other books were produced, and after some deliberation, she chose Fordyce’s Sermons. Lydian gaped as she opened the volume, and before she had, with very monotonous solemnity, read three pages, he interrupted her with:

“Do you know, pappa, that my aunt Phillips talks of turning away Richardine, and if she does, Colonel Forster will hire her? My uncle told me so himself on Saturday. I shall walk to Meryton to-morrow to hear more about it and to ask when Mistress Denny comes back from town.”

Lydian was bid by his two eldest brothers to hold his tongue, but Mistress Collins, much offended, laid aside her book, and said:

“I have often observed how little young gentlemen are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess;—for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no longer importune my young cousin.”

Then, turning to Mistress Bennet, she offered herself as her antagonist at Backgammon. Mistress Bennet accepted the challenge, observing that she acted very wisely in leaving the boys to their own trifling amusements. Mr. Bennet and his sons apologised most civilly for Lydian’s interruption, and promised that it should not occur again, if she would resume her book, but Mistress Collins, after assuring them that she bore her young cousin no ill-will, and should never resent his behaviour as any affront, seated herself at another table with Mistress Bennet, and prepared for backgammon.

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Chapter Fifteen

MISTRESS COLLINS WAS NOT a sensible woman, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society; the greatest part of her life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly mother, and though she belonged to one of the universities, she had merely kept the necessary terms, without forming at it any useful acquaintance. The subjection in which her mother had brought her up had given her originally great humility of manner, but it was now a good deal counteracted by the self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. A fortunate chance had recommended her to Lord Christopher de Bourgh when the living of Hunsford was vacant, and the respect which she felt for his high rank, and her veneration for him as her patron, mingling with a very good opinion of herself, of her authority as a clergywoman, and her right as a rector, made her altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility.

Having now a good house and a very sufficient income, she intended to marry, and in seeking a reconciliation with the Longbourn family, she had a husband in view, as she meant to choose one of the sons if she found them as handsome and amiable as they were represented by common report. This was her plan of amends—of atonement—for inheriting their mother's estate, and she thought it an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitableness, and excessively generous and disinterested on her own part.

Her plan did not vary on seeing them.—Master Bennet's lovely face confirmed her views and established all her strictest notions of what was due to seniority, and for the first evening, *he* was her settled choice. The next morning, however, made an alteration, for in a quarter of an hour's têtê-a-têtê with Mr. Bennet before breakfast, a conversation beginning with her parsonage-house, and leading naturally to the avowal of her hopes, that a master might be found for it at Longbourn, produced from him, amid very complaisant smiles and general encouragement, a caution against the very James she had fixed on. "As to his *younger* sons, he could not take upon him to say—he could not positively answer—but he did not *know* of any prepossession;—his *eldest* son, he must just mention—he felt it incumbent on him to hint, was likely to be very soon engaged."

Mistress Collins had only to change from James to Elias—and it was soon done—done while Mr. Bennet was stirring the fire. Elias, equally next to James in birth and beauty, succeeded him, of course.

Mr. Bennet treasured up the hint and trusted that he might soon have two sons married, and the woman whom he could not bear to speak of the day before was now high in his good graces.

Lydian's intention of walking to Meryton was not forgotten; every brother except Matthew agreed to go with him, and Mistress Collins was to attend them, at the request of Mistress Bennet, who was most anxious to get rid of her, and have her library to herself; for thither Mistress Collins had followed her after breakfast; and there she would continue, nominally engaged with one of the largest folios in the collection, but really talking to Mistress Bennet, with little cessation, of her house and garden at Hunsford. Such doings discomposed Mistress Bennet exceedingly. In her library, she had been always sure of leisure and tranquillity, and though prepared, as she told Elias, to meet with folly and conceit in every other room of the house, she was used to be free from them there; her civility, therefore, was most prompt in inviting Mistress Collins to join her sons in their walk; and Mistress Collins, being in fact much better fitted for a walker than a reader, was extremely pleased to close her large book, and go.

In pompous nothings on her side, and civil assents on that of her cousins, their time passed till they entered Meryton. The attention of the younger ones was then no longer to be gained by *her*. Their eyes were immediately wandering up in the street in quest of the officers, and nothing

less than a very smart hat indeed, or a really new muslin in a shop window, could recall them.

But the attention of every gentleman was soon caught by a young woman, whom they had never seen before, of most ladylike appearance, walking with another officer on the other side of the way. The officer was the very Mistress Denny concerning whose return from London Lydian came to inquire, and she curtseyed as they passed. All were struck with the stranger’s air, all wondered who she could be; and Kit and Lydian, determined if possible to find out, led the way across the street, under pretence of wanting something in an opposite shop, and fortunately had just gained the pavement when the two ladies, turning back, had reached the same spot. Mistress Denny addressed them directly, and entreated permission to introduce her friend, Mistress Wickham, who had returned with her the day before from town, and she was happy to say had accepted a commission in their corps. This was exactly as it should be, for the young woman wanted only regimentals to make her completely charming. Her appearance was greatly in her favour; she had all the best parts of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address. The introduction was followed up on her side by a happy readiness of conversation—a readiness at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming; and the whole party was still standing and talking together very agreeably, when the sound of horses drew their notice, and Darcy and Bingley were seen riding down the street. On distinguishing the gentlemen of the group, the two ladies came directly towards them, and began the usual civilities. Bingley was the principal spokeswoman, and Master Bennet the principal object. She was then, she said, on her way to Longbourn on purpose to inquire after him. Mistress Darcy corroborated it with a bow, and was beginning to determine not to fix her eyes on Elias, when they were suddenly arrested by the sight of the stranger, and Elias happening to see the countenance of both as they looked at each other, was all astonishment at the effect of the meeting. Both changed colour; one looked white, the other red. Mistress Wickham, after a few moments, touched her bonnet—a salutation which Mistress Darcy just deigned to return. What could be the meaning of it? It was impossible to imagine; it was impossible not to long to know. In another minute, Mistress Bingley, but without seeming to have noticed what passed, took leave and rode on with her friend.

Mistress Denny and Mistress Wickham walked with the young gentlemen to the door of Mistress Phillip's house, and then made their curtseys, in spite of Master Lydian's pressing entreaties that they should come in, and even in spite of Mr. Phillips's throwing up the parlour window and loudly seconding the invitation.

Mr. Phillips was always glad to see his nephews, and the two eldest, from their recent absence, were particularly welcome, and he was eagerly expressing his surprise at their sudden return home, which, as their own carriage had not fetched them, he should have known nothing about, if he had not happened to see Mistress Jones's shop-girl in the street, who had told him that they were not to send any more draughts to Netherfield because the Master Bennets were come away, when his civility was claimed towards Mistress Collins by James's introduction of her. He received her with his very best politeness, which she returned with as much more, apologising for her intrusion, without any previous acquaintance with him, which she could not help flattering herself, however, might be justified by her relationship to the young gentlemen who introduced her to his notice. Mr. Phillips was quite awed by such an excess of good breeding, but his contemplation of one stranger was soon put to an end by exclamations and inquiries about the other, of whom, however, he could only tell his nephews what they already knew, that Mistress Denny had brought her from London, and that she was to have a lieutenant's commission in the ——shire. He had been watching her the last hour, he said, as she walked up and down the street, and had Mistress Wickham appeared, Kit and Lydian would certainly have continued the occupation, but unluckily, no one passed windows now except a few of the officers, who, in comparison with the stranger, were become "stupid, disagreeable willows." Some of them were to dine with the Phillipses the next day, and their uncle promised to make his wife call on Mistress Wickham, and give her an invitation also, if the family from Longbourn would come in the evening. This was agreed to, and Mr. Phillips protested that they would have a nice, comfortable noisy game of lottery tickets, and a little bit of hot supper afterwards. The prospect of such delights was very cheering, and they parted in mutual good spirits. Mistress Collins repeated her apologies in quitting the room, and was assured with unwearying civility that they were perfectly needless.

As they walked home, Elias related to James what he had seen pass between the two ladies, but though James would have defended either or

both, had they appeared to be in the wrong, he could no more explain such behaviour than his brother.

Mistress Collins, on her return, highly gratified Mr. Bennet by admiring Mr. Phillips's manners and politeness. She protested that, except Lord Christopher and his son, she had never seen a more elegant man; for he had not only received her with the utmost civility, but even pointedly included her in his invitation for the next evening, although utterly unknown to him before. Something, she supposed, might be attributed to her connection with them, but yet she had never met with so much attention in the whole course of her life.

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Chapter Sixteen

AS NO OBJECTION was made to the young people's engagement with their uncle, and all Mistress Collins's scruples of leaving Mistress and Mr. Bennet for a single evening during her visit were most steadily resisted, the coach conveyed her and her five cousins at a suitable hour to Meryton; and the boys had the pleasure of hearing, as they entered the drawing-room, that Mistress Wickham had accepted their aunt's invitation, and was then in the house.

When this information was given, and they had all taken their seats, Mistress Collins was at leisure to look around her and admire, and she was so much struck with the size and furniture of the apartment, that she declared she might almost have supposed herself in the small summer breakfast-parlour at Rosings; a comparison that did not at first convey much gratification; but when Mr. Phillips understood from her what Rosings was, and who was its proprietor, when he had listened to the description of only one of Lord Christopher's drawing-rooms, and found that the chimney-piece alone had cost eight hundred pounds, he felt all the force of the compliment, and would hardly have resented a comparison with the housekeeper's room.

In describing to him all the grandeur of Lord Christopher and his mansion, with occasional digressions in praise of her own humble abode, and the improvements it was receiving, she was happily employed until the ladies joined them, and she found in Mr. Phillips a very attentive listener,

whose opinion of her consequence increased with what he heard, and who was resolving to retail it all among his neighbours as soon as he could. To the boys, who could not listen to their cousin, and who had nothing to do but to wish for an instrument, and examine their own indifferent imitations of china on the mantelpiece, the interval of waiting appeared very long. It was over at last, however. The ladies did approach, and when Mistress Wickham walked into the room, Elias felt that he had neither been seeing her before, nor thinking of her since, with the smallest degree of unreasonable admiration. The officers of the ——shire were, in general, a very creditable, ladylike set, and the best of them were of the present party, but Mistress Wickham was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk, as *they* were superior to the broad-faced, stuffy aunt Phillips, breathing port wine, who followed them into the room.

Mistress Wickham was the happy woman towards whom almost every male eye was turned, and Elias was the happy man by whom she finally seated herself; and the agreeable manner in which she immediately fell into conversation, though it was only on its being a wet night, made him feel that the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker.

With such rivals for the notice of the fair as Mistress Wickham and the officers, Mistress Collins seemed to sink into insignificance; to the young gentlemen, she certainly was nothing, but she had still at intervals a kind listener in Mr. Phillips and was by his watchfulness, most abundantly supplied with coffee and muffin. When the card-tables were placed, she had the opportunity of obliging him in turn, by sitting down to whist.

“I know little of the game at present,” said she, “but I shall be glad to improve myself, for in my situation in life—” Mr. Phillips was very glad for her compliance, but could not wait for her reason.

Mistress Wickham did not play at whist, and with ready delight was she received at the other table between Elias and Lydian. At first, there seemed danger of Lydian’s engrossing her entirely, for he was a most determined talker, but being likewise extremely fond of lottery tickets, he soon grew too much interested in the game, too eager in making bets and exclaiming after prizes to have attention for anyone in particular. Allowing for the common demands of the game, Mistress Wickham was therefore at leisure to talk to Elias, and he was very willing to hear her, though what he chiefly wished to hear he could not hope to be told, the history of her acquaintance

with Mistress Darcy. He dared not even mention that lady. His curiosity, however, was unexpectedly relieved. Mistress Wickham began the subject herself. She inquired how far Netherfield was from Meryton; and, after receiving his answer, asked in a hesitating manner how long Mistress Darcy had been staying there.

“About a month,” said Elias, and then, unwilling to let the subject drop, added, “She is a woman of very large property in Derbyshire, I understand.”

“Yes,” replied Mistress Wickham;—“her estate there is a noble one. A clear ten thousand per annum. You could not have met with a person more capable of giving you certain information on that head than myself,—for I have been connected with her family in a particular manner from my infancy.”

Elias could not but look surprised.

“You may well be surprised, Master Bennet, at such an assertion, after seeing, as you probably might, the very cold manner of our meeting yesterday.—Are you much acquainted with Mistress Darcy?”

“As much as I ever wish to be,” cried Elias very warmly.—“I have spent four days in the same house with her, and I think her very disagreeable.”

“I have no right to give *my* opinion,” said Wickham, “as to her being agreeable or otherwise. I am not qualified to form one. I have known her too long and too well to be a fair judge. It is impossible for *me* to be impartial. But I believe your opinion of her would, in general, astonish—and perhaps you would not express it quite so strongly anywhere else.—Here you are in your own family.”

“Upon my word, I say no more *here* than I might say in any house in the neighbourhood, except Netherfield. She is not at all liked in Hertfordshire. Everybody is disgusted with her pride. You will not find her more favourably spoken of by anyone.”

“I cannot pretend to be sorry,” said Wickham, after a short interruption, “that she or that any woman should not be estimated beyond their deserts, but with *her*, I believe it does not often happen. The world is blinded by her fortune and consequence, or frightened by her high and imposing manners, and sees her only as she chooses to be seen.”

“I should take her, even on *my* slight acquaintance, to be an ill-tempered woman.” Wickham only shook her head.

“I wonder,” said she, at the next opportunity of speaking, “whether she is likely to be in this country much longer.”

“I do not at all know, but I *heard* nothing of her going away when I was at Netherfield. I hope your plans in favour of the ——shire will not be affected by her being in the neighbourhood.”

“Oh! No—it is not for *me* to be driven away by Mistress Darcy. If *she* wishes to avoid seeing *me*, she must go. We are not on friendly terms, and it always gives me pain to meet her, but I have no reason for avoiding *her* but what I might proclaim before all the world, a sense of very great ill-usage, and most painful regrets at her being what she is. Her mother, Master Bennet, the late Mistress Darcy, was one of the best women that ever breathed, and the truest friend I ever had; and I can never be in company with this Mistress Darcy without being grieved to the soul by a thousand tender recollections. Her behaviour to myself has been scandalous, but I verily believe I could forgive her anything and everything, rather than her disappointing the hopes and disgracing the memory of her mother.”

Elias found the interest of the subject increase and listened with all his heart, but the delicacy of it prevented further inquiry.

Mistress Wickham began to speak on more general topics, Meryton, the neighbourhood, the society, appearing highly pleased with all that she had yet seen and speaking of the latter with gentle but very intelligible gallantry.

“It was the prospect of constant society, and good society,” she added, “which was my chief inducement to enter the ——shire. I knew it to be a most respectable, agreeable corps, and my friend Denny tempted me further by her account of their present quarters, and the very great attentions and excellent acquaintances Meryton had procured them. Society, I own, is necessary to me. I have been a disappointed woman, and my spirits will not bear solitude. I *must* have employment and society. A military life is not what I was intended for, but circumstances have now made it eligible. The church *ought* to have been my profession—I was brought up for the church, and I should at this time have been in possession of a most valuable living, had it pleased the lady we were speaking of just now.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes—the late Mistress Darcy bequeathed me the next presentation of the best living in her gift. She was my godmother, and excessively attached to me. I cannot do justice to her kindness. She meant to provide for me amply, and thought she had done it; but when the living fell, it was given elsewhere.”

“Good heavens!” cried Elias, “but how could *that* be?—How could her will be disregarded?—Why did you not seek legal redress?”

“There was just such an informality in the terms of the bequest as to give me no hope from law. A woman of honour could not have doubted the intention, but Mistress Darcy chose to doubt it—or to treat it as a merely conditional recommendation, and to assert that I had forfeited all claim to it by extravagance, imprudence, in short anything or nothing. Certain it is, that the living became vacant two years ago, exactly as I was of an age to hold it, and that it was given to another woman; and no less certain is it, that I cannot accuse myself of having really done anything to deserve to lose it. I have a warm, unguarded temper, and I may have spoken my opinion *of* her, and *to* her, too freely. I can recall nothing worse. But the fact is, that we are very different sort of women, and that she hates me.”

“This is quite shocking!—She deserves to be publicly disgraced.”

“Some time or other she *will* be—but it shall not be by *me*. Till I can forget her mother, I can never defy or expose *her*.”

Elias honoured her for such feelings, and thought her handsomer than ever as she expressed them.

“But what,” said he, after a pause, “can have been her motive?—What can have induced her to behave so cruelly?”

“A thorough, determined dislike of me—a dislike which I cannot but attribute in some measure to jealousy. Had the late Mistress Darcy liked me less, her daughter might have borne with me better, but her mother’s uncommon attachment to me irritated her, I believe, very early in life. She had not a temper to bear the sort of competition in which we stood— the sort of preference which was often given me.”

“I had not thought Mistress Darcy so bad as this—though I have never liked her.—I had not thought so very ill of her—I had supposed her to be despising her fellow creatures in general, but did not suspect her of descending to such malicious revenge, such injustice, such inhumanity as this!”

After a few minutes’ reflection, however, he continued, “I *do* remember her boasting one day, at Netherfield, of the implacability of her resentments, of her having an unforgiving temper. Her disposition must be dreadful.”

“I will not trust myself on the subject,” replied Wickham; “*I* can hardly be just to her.”

Elias was again deep in thought, and after a time exclaimed, “To treat in such a manner the goddaughter, the friend, the favourite of her mother!”—He could have added, “A young woman, too, like *you*, whose very countenance may vouch for your being amiable”—but he contented himself with, “And one, too, who had probably been her companion from childhood, connected together, as I think you said, in the closest manner!”

“We were born in the same parish, within the same park; the greatest part of our youth was passed together; inmates of the same house, sharing the same amusements, objects of the same parental care. *My* mother began life in the profession which your aunt, Mistress Phillips, appears to do so much credit to—but she gave up everything to be of use to the late Mistress Darcy and devoted all her time to the care of the Pemberley property. She was most highly esteemed by Mistress Darcy, a most intimate, confidential friend. Mistress Darcy often acknowledged herself to be under the greatest obligations to my mother’s active superintendence, and when, immediately before my mother’s death, Mistress Darcy gave her a voluntary promise of providing for me, I am convinced that she felt it to be as much a debt of gratitude to *her*, as of her affection to myself.”

“How strange!” cried Elias. “How abominable!—I wonder that the very pride of this Mistress Darcy has not made her just to you!—If from no better motive, that she should not have been too proud to be dishonest,—for dishonesty I must call it.”

“It *is* wonderful,”—replied Wickham,—“for almost all her actions may be traced to pride,—and pride had often been her best friend. It has connected her nearer with virtue than with any other feeling. But we are none of us consistent, and in her behaviour to me, there were stronger impulses even than pride.”

“Can such abominable pride as her have ever done her good?”

“Yes. It has often led her to be liberal and generous,—to give her money freely, to display hospitality, to assist her tenants, and relieve the poor. Family pride and *filial* pride, for she is very proud of what her mother was, have done this. Not to appear to disgrace her family, to degenerate from the popular qualities, or lose the influence of the Pemberley House, is a powerful motive. She has also *sisterly* pride, which, with *some* sisterly affection, makes her a very kind and careful guardian of her brother, and you will hear her generally cried up as the most attentive and best of sisters.”

“What sort of boy is Master Darcy?”

She shook her head.— “I wish I could call him amiable. It gives me pain to speak ill of a Darcy. But he is too much like his sister—very, very proud.—As a child, he was affectionate and pleasing and extremely fond of me, and I have devoted hours and hours to his amusement. But he is nothing to me now. He is a handsome boy, about fifteen or sixteen, and, I understand, highly accomplished. Since his mother’s death, his home has been London, where a gentleman lives with him, and superintends his education.”

After many pauses and many trials of other subjects, Elias could not help reverting once more to the first, and saying:

“I am astonished at her intimacy with Mistress Bingley! How can Mistress Bingley, who seems good humour itself, and is, I really believe, truly amiable, be in friendship with such a woman? How can they suit each other?—Do you know Mistress Bingley?”

“Not at all.”

“She is a sweet-tempered, amiable, charming woman. She cannot know what Mistress Darcy is.”

“Probably not;—but Mistress Darcy can please where she chooses. She does not want abilities. She can be a conversible companion if she thinks it worth her while. Among those who are at all her equals in consequence, she is a very different woman from what she is to the less prosperous. Her pride never deserts her, but with the rich, she is liberal-minded, just, sincere, rational, honourable, and perhaps agreeable—allowing something for fortune and figure.”

The whist party soon afterwards breaking up, the players gathered round the other table and Mistress Collins took her station between her cousin Elias and Mr. Phillips.—The usual inquiries as to her success were made by the latter. It had not been very great; she had lost every point, but when Mr. Phillips began to express his concern thereupon, she assured him with much earnest gravity that it was not of the least importance, that she considered the money as a mere trifle, and begged that he would not make himself uneasy.

“I know very well, sir,” said she, “that when persons sit down to a card table, they must take their chances of these things,—and happily I am not in such circumstances as to make five shillings any object. There are undoubtedly many who could not say the same, but thanks to Lord

Christopher de Bourgh, I am removed far beyond the necessity of regarding little matters."

Mistress Wickham's attention was caught, and after observing Mistress Collins for a few moments, she asked Elias in a low voice whether his relation was very intimately acquainted with the family of de Bourgh.

"Lord Christopher de Bourgh," he replied, "has very lately given her a living. I hardly know how Mistress Collins was first introduced to his notice, but she certainly has not known him long."

"You know, of course, that Lord Christopher de Bourgh and Lord Anthony Darcy were brothers; consequently, that he is uncle to the present Mistress Darcy."

"No, indeed, I did not.—I knew nothing at all of Lord Christopher's connections. I never heard of his existence till the day before yesterday."

"His son, Master de Bourgh, will have a very large fortune, and it is believed that he and his cousin will unite the two estates."

This information made Elias smile, as he thought of poor Master Bingley. Vain indeed must be all his attentions, vain and useless his affection for her brother and his praise of herself, if she were already self-destined for another.

"Mistress Collins," said he, "speaks highly both of Lord Christopher and his son, but from some particulars that she has related of his Lordship, I suspect her gratitude misleads her and that in spite of him being her patron, he is an arrogant, conceited man."

"I believe him to be both in a great degree," replied Wickham; "I have not seen him for many years, but I very well remember that I never liked him and that his manners were dictatorial and insolent. He has the reputation of being remarkably sensible and clever, but I rather believe he derives part of his abilities from his rank and fortune, part from his authoritative manner, and the rest from the pride for his niece, who chooses that everyone connected with her should have an understanding of the first class."

Elias allowed that she had given a very rational account of it, and they continued talking together, with mutual satisfaction till supper put an end to cards, and gave the rest of the gentlemen their share of Mistress Wickham's attentions. There could be no conversation in the noise of Mr. Phillips's supper party, but her manners recommended her to everybody. Whatever she said, was said well, and whatever she did, done gracefully. Elias went

away with his head full of her. He could think of nothing but of Mistress Wickham, and of what she had told him, all the way home; but there was not time for him even to mention her name as they went, for neither Lydian nor Mistress Collins were once silent. Lydian talked incessantly of lottery tickets, of the fish he had lost and the fish he had won; and Mistress Collins in describing the civility of Mistress and Mr. Phillips, protesting that she did not in the least regard her losses at whist, enumerating all the dishes at supper, and repeatedly fearing that she crowded her cousins, had more to say than she could well manage before the carriage stopped at Longbourn House.

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Chapter Seventeen

ELIAS RELATED to James the next day what had passed between Mistress Wickham and himself. James listened with astonishment and concern;—he knew not how to believe that Mistress Darcy could be so unworthy of Mistress Bingley's regard, and yet, it was not in his nature to question the veracity of a young woman of such amiable appearance as Wickham.—The possibility of her having endured such unkindness, was enough to interest all his tender feelings; and nothing remained therefore to be done, but to think well of them both, to defend the conduct of each, and throw into the account of accident or mistake whatever could not be otherwise explained.

"They have both," said he, "been deceived, I dare say, in some way or other, of which we can form no idea. Interested people have perhaps misrepresented each to the other. It is, in short, impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them, without actual blame on either side."

"Very true, indeed;—and now, my dear James, what have you got to say on behalf of the interested people who have probably been concerned in the business? Do clear *them* too, or we shall be obliged to think ill of somebody."

"Laugh as much as you choose, but you will not laugh me out of my opinion. My dearest Lee, do but consider in what a disgraceful light it places Mistress Darcy, to be treating her mother's favourite in such a manner,—one, whom her mother had promised to provide for. It is

impossible. No woman of common humanity, no woman who had any value for her character, could be capable of it. Can her most intimate friends be so excessively deceived in her? Oh! No."

"I can much more easily believe Mistress Bingley's being imposed on than that Mistress Wickham should invent such a history of herself as she gave me last night: names, facts, everything mentioned without ceremony. If it be not so, let Mistress Darcy contradict it. Besides, there was truth in her looks."

"It is difficult indeed—it is distressing.—One does not know what to think."

"I beg your pardon;—one knows exactly what to think."

But James could think with certainty on only one point—that Mistress Bingley, if she *had been* imposed on, would have much to suffer when the affair became public.

The two young gentlemen were summoned from the shrubbery, where this conversation passed, by the arrival of the very persons of whom they had been speaking; Mistress Bingley and her brothers came to give their personal invitation for the long-expected ball at Netherfield, which was fixed for the following Tuesday. The two gentlemen were delighted to see their dear friend again, called it an age since they had met, and repeatedly asked what he had been doing with himself since their separation. To the rest of the family, they paid little attention, avoiding Mr. Bennet as much as possible, saying not much to Elias, and nothing at all to the others. They were soon gone again, rising from their seats with an activity which took their sister by surprise, and hurrying off as if eager to escape from Mr. Bennet's civilities.

The prospect of the Netherfield ball was extremely agreeable to every male of the family. Mr. Bennet chose to consider it as given in compliment to his eldest son, and was particularly flattered by receiving the invitation from Mistress Bingley herself, instead of a ceremonious card. James pictured to himself a happy evening in the society of his two friends, and the attentions of his sister; and Elias thought with pleasure of dancing a great deal with Mistress Wickham, and of seeing a confirmation of everything in Mistress Darcy's look and behaviour. The happiness anticipated by Christopher and Lydian depended less on any single event, or any particular person, for though they each, like Elias, meant to dance half the evening with Mistress Wickham, she was by no means the only partner

who could satisfy them, and a ball was, at any rate, a ball. And even Matthew could assure his family that he had no disinclination for it.

“While I can have my mornings to myself,” said he, “it is enough.—I think it is no sacrifice to join occasionally in evening engagements. Society has claims on us all, and I profess myself one of those who consider intervals of recreation and amusement as desirable for everybody.”

Elias’s spirits were so high on this occasion, that though he did not often speak unnecessarily to Mistress Collins, he could not help asking her whether she intended to accept Mistress Bingley’s invitation, and if she did, whether she would think it proper to join in the evening’s amusement; and he was rather surprised to find that she entertained no scruple whatever on that head, and was very far from dreading a rebuke either from the Archbishop, or Lord Christopher de Bourgh, by venturing to dance.

“I am by no means of the opinion, I assure you,” said she, “that a ball of this kind, given by a young woman of character, to respectable people, can have any evil tendency, and I am so far from objecting to dancing myself, that I shall hope to be honoured with the hands of all my fair cousins in the course of the evening; and I take this opportunity of soliciting yours, Master Elias, for the two first dances especially,—a preference which I trust my cousin James will attribute to the right cause, and not to any disrespect for him.”

Elias felt himself completely taken in. He had fully proposed being engaged by Mistress Wickham for those very dances:—and to have Mistress Collins instead! His liveliness had never been worse timed. There was no help for it, however. Mistress Wickham’s happiness and his own were perforce delayed a little longer, and Mistress Collins’s proposal accepted with as good a grace as he could. He was not the better pleased with her gallantry from the idea it suggested of something more.—It now first struck him, that *he* was selected from among his brothers as worthy of being master of Hunsford Parsonage, and of assisting to form a quadrille table at Rosings, in the absence of more eligible visitors. The idea soon reached to conviction, as he observed her increasing civilities toward himself, and heard her frequent attempt at a compliment on his wit and vivacity; and though more astonished than gratified himself by this effect of his charms, it was not long before his father gave him to understand that the probability of their marriage was extremely agreeable to *him*. Elias, however, did not choose to take the hint, being well aware that a serious

dispute must be the consequence of any reply. Mistress Collins might never make the offer, and till she did, it was useless to quarrel about her.

If there had not been a Netherfield ball to prepare for and talk of, the younger Master Bennets would have been in a very pitiable state at this time, for from the day of the invitation, to the day of the ball, there was such a succession of rain as prevented their walking to Meryton once. No uncle, no officers, no news could be sought after;—the very shoe-buckles for Netherfield were got by proxy. Even Elias might have found some trial of his patience in weather which totally suspended the improvement of his acquaintance with Mistress Wickham; and nothing less than a dance on Tuesday, could have made such a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday endurable to Kit and Lydian.

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Chapter Eighteen

TILL ELIAS ENTERED the drawing-room at Netherfield, and looked in vain for Mistress Wickham among the cluster of red coats there assembled, a doubt of her being present had never occurred to him. The certainty of meeting her had not been checked by any of those recollections that might not unreasonably have alarmed him. He had dressed with more than usual care, and prepared in the highest spirits for the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of her heart, trusting that it was not more than might be won in the course of the evening. But in an instant arose the dreadful suspicion of her being purposely omitted for Mistress Darcy's pleasure in the Bingleys' invitation to the officers, and though this was not exactly the case, the absolute fact of her absence was pronounced by her friend Denny, to whom Lydian eagerly applied, and who told them that Wickham had been obliged to go to town on business the day before, and was not yet returned; adding, with a significant smile,

"I do not imagine her business would have called her away just now, if she had not wanted to avoid a certain lady here."

This part of her intelligence, though unheard by Lydian, was caught by Elias, and as it assured him that Darcy was not less answerable for Wickham's absence than if his first surmise had been just, every feeling of displeasure against the former was so sharpened by immediate disappointment, that he could hardly reply with tolerable civility to the polite inquiries which she directly afterwards approached to make.—

Attention, forbearance, patience with Darcy, was injury to Wickham. He was resolved against any sort of conversation with her, and turned away with a degree of ill-humour which he could not wholly surmount even in speaking to Mistress Bingley, whose blind partiality provoked him.

But Elias was not formed for ill-humour, and though every prospect of his own was destroyed for the evening, it could not dwell long on his spirits; and having told all his griefs to Charlot Lucas, whom he had not seen for a week, he was soon able to make a voluntary transition to the oddities of his cousin, and to point her out to his particular notice. The first two dances, however, brought a return of distress; they were dances of mortification. Mistress Collins, awkward and solemn, apologising instead of attending, and often moving wrong without being aware of it, gave him all the shame and misery which a disagreeable partner for a couple of dances can give. The moment of his release from her was ecstasy.

He danced next with an officer, and had the refreshment of talking of Wickham, and of hearing that she was universally liked. When those dances were over, he returned to Charlot Lucas, and was in conversation with him, when he found himself suddenly addressed by Mistress Darcy who took him so much by surprise in her application for his hand, that, without knowing what he did, he accepted her. She walked away again immediately, and he was left to fret over his own want of presence of mind; Charlot tried to console him.

“I dare say you will find her very agreeable.”

“Heaven forbid! —*That* would be the greatest misfortune of all! —To find a woman agreeable whom one is determined to hate! —Do not wish me such an evil.”

When the dancing recommenced, however, and Darcy approached to claim his hand, Charlot could not help cautioning him in a whisper, not to be a simpleton, and allow his fancy for Wickham to make him appear unpleasant in the eyes of a woman ten times her consequence. Elias made no answer and took his place in the set, amazed at the dignity to which he had arrived in being allowed to stand opposite to Mistress Darcy and reading in his neighbours’ looks, their equal amazement in beholding it.

They stood for some time without speaking a word, and he began to imagine that their silence was to last through the two dances, and at first was resolved not to break it; till suddenly fancying that it would be the greater punishment to his partner to oblige her to talk, he made some slight

observation on the dance. She replied, and was again silent. After a pause of some minutes, he addressed her a second time with,

“It is *your* turn to say something now, Mistress Darcy.—*I* talked about the dance, and *you* ought to make some sort of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples.”

She smiled, and assured him that whatever he wished her to say should be said.

“Very well.—That reply will do for the present.—Perhaps by and by, I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones.—But *now* we may be silent.”

“Do you talk by rule, then, while you are dancing?”

“Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd to be entirely silent for half an hour together, and yet for the advantage of *some*, conversation ought to be so arranged, as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible.”

“Are you consulting your own feelings in the present case, or do you imagine that you are gratifying mine?”

“Both,” replied Elias archly, “for I have always seen a great similarity in the turn of our minds.—We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition, unwilling to speak, unless we expect to say something that will amaze the whole room, and be handed down to posterity with all the eclat of a proverb.”

“This is no very striking resemblance of your own character, I am sure,” said she. “How near it may be to *mine*, I cannot pretend to say.—*You* think it a faithful portrait undoubtedly.”

“I must not decide on my own performance.”

She made no answer, and they were again silent till they had gone down the dance, when she asked him if he and his brothers did not very often walk to Meryton. He answered in the affirmative, and, unable to resist the temptation, added, “When you met us there the other day, we had just been forming a new acquaintance.”

The effect was immediate. A deeper shade of hauteur overspread her features, but she said not a word, and Elias, though blaming himself for his own weakness, could not go on. At length Darcy spoke, and in a constrained manner said,

“Mistress Wickham is blessed with such happy manners as may ensure her *making* friends—whether she may be equally capable of *retaining* them,

is less certain."

"She has been so unlucky as to lose *your* friendship," replied Elias with emphasis, "and in a manner which she is likely to suffer from all her life."

Darcy made no answer, and seemed desirous of changing the subject. At that moment, Dame Willemina Lucas appeared close to them, meaning to pass through the set to the other side of the room, but on perceiving Mistress Darcy she stopped with a bow of superior courtesy to compliment her on her dancing and her partner.

"I have been most highly gratified indeed, my dear Madam. Such very superior dancing is not often seen. It is evident that you belong to the first circles. Allow me to say, however, that your fair partner does not disgrace you, and that I must hope to have this pleasure often repeated, especially when a certain desirable event, my dear Eli (glancing at his brother and Bingley,) shall take place. What congratulations will then flow in! I appeal to Mistress Darcy:—but let me not interrupt you, Madam.—You will not thank me for detaining you from the bewitching converse of that young gentleman, whose bright eyes are also upbraiding me."

The latter part of this address was scarcely heard by Darcy, but Dame Willemina's allusion to her friend seemed to strike her forcibly, and her eyes were directed with a very serious expression towards Bingley and James, who were dancing together. Recovering herself, however, shortly, she turned to her partner, and said,

"Dame Willemina's interruption has made me forget what we were talking of."

"I do not think we were speaking at all. Dame Willemina could not have interrupted two people in the room who had less to say for themselves.—We have tried two or three subjects already without success, and what we are to talk of next, I cannot imagine."

"What think you of books?" said she, smiling.

"Books—Oh! No.—I am sure we never read the same, or not with the same feelings."

"I am sorry you think so, but if that be the case, there can at least be no want of subject. We may compare our different opinions."

"No—I cannot talk of books in a ballroom; my head is always full of something else."

"The *present* always occupies you in such scenes—does it?" said she, with a look of doubt.

“Yes, always,” he replied, without knowing what he said, for his thoughts had wandered far from the subject, as soon afterwards appeared by him suddenly exclaiming, “I remember hearing you once say, Mistress Darcy, that you hardly ever forgave, that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose, as to its *being created*.”

“I am,” said she, with a firm voice.

“And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?”

“I hope not.”

“It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be secure of judging properly at first.”

“May I ask to what these questions tend?”

“Merely to the illustration of *your* character,” said he, endeavouring to shake off his gravity. “I am trying to make it out.”

“And what is your success?”

He shook his head. “I do not get on at all. I hear such different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly.”

“I can readily believe,” answered she gravely, “that reports may vary greatly with respect to me, and I could wish, Master Bennet, that you were not to sketch my character at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either.”

“But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity.”

“I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours,” she coldly replied. He said no more, and they went down the other dance and parted in silence; and on each side dissatisfied, though not to an equal degree, for in Darcy’s breast there was a tolerable powerful feeling towards him, which soon procured his pardon, and directed all her anger against another.

They had not long separated, when Master Bingley came towards him, and with an expression of civil disdain accosted him,

“So, Master Eli, I hear you are quite delighted with Georgia Wickham! —Your brother has been talking to me about her, and asking me a thousand questions, and I find that the young woman quite forgot to tell you, among her other communication, that she was the daughter of old Wickham, the late Mistress Darcy’s stewardess. Let me recommend you, however, as a friend, not to give implicit confidence to all her assertions; for as to Mistress Darcy’s using her ill, it is perfectly false; for, on the contrary, she has always been remarkably kind to her, though Georgia Wickham has

treated Mistress Darcy in a most infamous manner. I do not know the particulars, but I know very well that Mistress Darcy is not in the least to blame, that she cannot bear to hear Georgia Wickham mentioned, and that though my sister thought that she could not well avoid including her in her invitation to the officers, she was excessively glad to find that she had taken herself out of the way. Her coming into the country at all is a most insolent thing, indeed, and I wonder how she could presume to do it. I pity you, Master Eli, for this discovery of your favourite's guilt, but really, considering her descent, one could not expect much better."

"Her guilt and her descent appear by your account to be the same," said Elias angrily, "for I have heard you accuse her of nothing worse than of being the daughter of Mistress Darcy's stewardess, and of *that*, I can assure you, she informed me herself."

"I beg your pardon," replied Master Bingley, turning away with a sneer. "Excuse my interference.—It was kindly meant."

"Insolent boy!" said Elias to himself.—"You are much mistaken if you expect to influence me by such a paltry attack as this. I see nothing in it but your own wilful ignorance and the malice of Mistress Darcy." He then sought his eldest brother, who has undertaken to make inquiries on the same subject of Bingley. James met him with a smile of such sweet complacency, a glow of such happy expression, as sufficiently marked how well he was satisfied with the occurrences of the evening.—Elias instantly read his feelings, and at that moment, solicitude for Wickham, resentment against her enemies, and everything else, gave way before the hope of James's being in the fairest way for happiness.

"I want to know," said he, with a countenance no less smiling than his brother's, "what you have learnt about Mistress Wickham. But perhaps you have been too pleasantly engaged to think of any third person, in which case you may be sure of my pardon."

"No," replied James, "I have not forgotten her, but I have nothing satisfactory to tell you. Mistress Bingley does not know the whole of her history, and is quite ignorant of the circumstances which have principally offended Mistress Darcy, but she will vouch for the good conduct, the probity, and honour of her friend, and is perfectly convinced that Mistress Wickham has deserved much less attention from Mistress Darcy than she has received; and I am sorry to say by her account as well as her brother's, Mistress Wickham is by no means a respectable young woman. I am afraid

she has been very imprudent, and has deserved to lose Mistress Darcy's regard."

"Mistress Bingley does not know Mistress Wickham herself?"

"No; she never saw her till the other morning at Meryton."

"This account, then, is what she has received from Mistress Darcy. I am perfectly satisfied. But what does she say of the living?"

"She does not exactly recollect the circumstances, though she has heard them from Mistress Darcy more than once, but she believes that it was left to her *conditionally* only."

"I have not a doubt of Mistress Bingley's sincerity," said Elias warmly, "but you must excuse my not being convinced by assurances only. Mistress Bingley's defence of her friend was a very able one, I dare say, but since she is unacquainted with several parts of the story and has learnt the rest from that friend herself, I shall venture to still think of both ladies as I did before."

He then changed the discourse to one more gratifying to each, and on which there could be no difference of sentiment. Elias listened with delight to the happy, though modest hopes which James entertained of Mistress Bingley's regard, and said all in his power to heighten his confidence in it. On their being joined by Mistress Bingley herself, Elias withdrew to Master Lucas, to whose inquiry after the pleasantness of his last partner, he had scarcely replied, before Mistress Collins came up to them, and told him with great exultation that she had just been so fortunate as to make a most important discovery.

"I have found out," said she, "by a singular accident, that there is now in the room a near relation of my patron. I happened to overhear the lady herself mentioning to the young gentleman who does the honours of the house the names of her cousin, Master de Bourgh, and of his father, Lord Christopher. How wonderfully these sorts of things occur! Who would have thought of my meeting with—perhaps—a niece of Lord Christopher de Bourgh in this assembly!—I am most thankful that the discovery is made in time for me to pay my respects to her, which I am now going to do, and trust she will excuse my not having done it before. My total ignorance of the connection must plead my apology."

"You are not going to introduce yourself to Mistress Darcy?"

"Indeed I am. I shall entreat her pardon for not having done it earlier. I believe her to be Lord Christopher's *niece*. It will be in my power to assure

her that his Lordship was quite well yesterday se'nnight."

Elias tried hard to dissuade her from such a scheme, assuring her that Mistress Darcy would consider her addressing her without introduction as an impertinent freedom, rather than a compliment to her uncle, that it was not in the least necessary there should be any notice on either side; and that if it were, it must belong to Mistress Darcy, the superior in consequence, to begin the acquaintance.—Mistress Collins listened to him with the determined air of following her own inclination, and, when he ceased speaking, replied thus,

"My dear Master Elias, I have the highest opinion in the world in your excellent judgement in all matters within the scope of your understanding, but permit me to say, that there must be a wide difference between the established forms of ceremony amongst the laity, and those which regulate the clergy; for, give me leave to observe that I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom—provided that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time maintained. You must, therefore, allow me to follow the dictates of my conscience on this occasion, which leads me to perform what I look on as a point of duty. Pardon me for neglecting to profit by your advice, which on every other subject shall be my constant guide, though in the case before us, I consider myself more fitted by education and habitual study to decide on what is right than a young gentleman like yourself." And with a low curtsey, she left him to attack Mistress Darcy, whose reception of her advances he eagerly watched and whose astonishment at being so addressed was very evident. His cousin prefaced her speech with a solemn curtsey and though he could not hear a word of it, he felt as if hearing it all, and saw in the motion of her lips the words "apology," "Hunsford," and "Lord Christopher de Bourgh."—It vexed him to see her expose herself to such a woman. Mistress Darcy was eyeing her with unrestrained wonder, and when at last Mistress Collins allowed her time to speak, replied with an air of distant civility. Mistress Collins, however, was not discouraged from speaking again, and Mistress Darcy's contempt seemed abundantly increasing with the length of her second speech, and at the end of it she only made her a slight curtsey, and moved another way. Mistress Collins then returned to Elias.

"I have no reason, I assure you," said she, "to be dissatisfied with my reception. Mistress Darcy seemed much pleased with the attention. She

answered me with the utmost civility, and even paid me the compliment of saying that she was so well convinced of Lord Christopher’s discernment as to be certain he could never bestow a favour unworthily. It was really a very handsome thought. Upon the whole, I am much pleased with her.”

As Elias had no longer any interest of his own to pursue, he turned his attention almost entirely on his brother and Mistress Bingley, and the train of agreeable reflections which his observations gave birth to, made him perhaps almost as happy as James. He saw him in idea settled in that very house, in all the felicity which a marriage of true affection could bestow, and he felt capable, under such circumstances, of endeavouring even to like Bingley’s two brothers. His father’s thoughts, he plainly saw, were bent the same way, and he determined not to venture near him lest he might hear too much. When they sat down to supper, therefore, he considered it a most unlucky perverseness which placed them within one of each other, and deeply was he vexed to find that his father was talking to that one person (Lord Lucas) freely, openly, and of nothing else but expectation that James would soon be married to Mistress Bingley.—It was an animating subject, and Mr. Bennet seemed incapable of fatigue while enumerating the advantages of the match. Her being such a charming young woman, and so rich, and living but three miles from them, were the first points of self-gratulation, and then it was such a comfort to think how fond the two brothers were of James, and to be certain that they must desire the connection as much as he could do. It was, moreover, such a promising thing for his younger sons, as James’s marrying so greatly must throw them in the way of other rich women; and lastly, it was so pleasant at his time of life to be able to consign his single sons to the care of their brother, that he might not be obliged to go into company more than he liked. It was necessary to make this circumstance a matter of pleasure, because on such occasions it is the etiquette; but no one was less likely than Mr. Bennet to find comfort in staying home at any period of his life. He concluded with many good wishes that Lord Lucas might soon be equally fortunate, though evidently and triumphantly believing there was no chance of it.

In vain did Elias endeavour to check the rapidity of his father’s words, or persuade him to describe his felicity in a less audible whisper, for, to his inexpressible vexation, he could perceive that the chief of it was overheard by Mistress Darcy, who sat opposite to them. His father only scolded him for being nonsensical.

“What is Mistress Darcy to me, pray, that I should be afraid of her? I am sure we owe her no such particular civility as to be obliged to say nothing she may not like to hear.”

“For heaven’s sake, sir, speak lower.—What advantage can it be for you to offend Mistress Darcy?—You will never recommend yourself to her friend by so doing!”

Nothing that he could say, however, had any influence. His father would talk of his views in the same intelligible tone. Elias blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation. He could not help frequently glancing his eye at Mistress Darcy, though every glance convinced him of what he dreaded; for though she was not always looking at his father, he was convinced that her attention was invariably fixed by him. The expression of her face changed gradually from indignant contempt to a composed and steady gravity.

At length, however, Mr. Bennet had no more to say; and Lord Lucas, who had been long yawning at the repetition of delights which he saw no likelihood of sharing, was left to the comforts of cold ham and chicken. Elias now began to revive. But not long was the interval of tranquillity; for, when supper was over, singing was talked of, and he had the mortification of seeing Matthew, after very little entreaty, preparing to oblige the company. By many significant looks and silent entreaties, did he endeavour to prevent such a proof of complaisance,—but in vain; Matthew would not understand them; such an opportunity of exhibiting was delightful to him, and he began his song. Elias’s eyes were fixed on him with most painful sensations, and he watched his progress through the several stanzas with an impatience which was very ill-rewarded at their close; for Matthew, on receiving, amongst the thanks of the table, the hint of a hope that he might be prevailed on to favour them again, after the pause of half a minute began another. Matthew’s powers were by no means fitted for such a display; his voice was weak, and his manner affected.—Elias was in agonies. He looked at James, to see how he bore it, but James was very composedly talking to Bingley. He looked at her two brothers, and saw them making signs of derision at each other, and at Darcy, who continued, however, imperturbably grave. He looked at his mother to entreat her interference, lest Matthew should be singing all night. She took the hint, and when Matthew had finished his second song, said aloud,

“That will do extremely well, child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young gentlemen have time to exhibit.”

Matthew, though pretending not to hear, was somewhat disconcerted, and Elias, sorry for him, and sorry for his mother’s speech, was afraid his anxiety had done no good.—Others of the party were now applied to.

“If I,” said Mistress Collins, “were so fortunate as to be able to sing, I should have great pleasure, I am sure, in obliging the company with an air, for I consider music as a very innocent diversion, and perfectly compatible with the profession of a clergywoman.—I do not mean, however, to assert that we can be justified in devoting too much of our time to music, for there are certainly other things to be attended to. The rector of a parish has much to do. In the first place, she must make such an agreement for tithes as may be beneficial to herself and not offensive to her patron. She must write her own sermons, and the time that remains will not be too much for her parish duties and the care and improvement of her dwelling, which she cannot be excused from making as comfortable as possible. And I do not think it of light importance that she should have attentive and conciliatory manners towards everybody, especially towards those to whom she owes her preferment. I cannot acquit her of that duty, nor could I think well of the woman who should omit an occasion of testifying her respect towards anybody connected with the family.” And with a curtsey to Mistress Darcy, she concluded her speech, which had been spoken so loud as to be heard by half the room.—Many stared.—Many smiled, but no one looked more amused than Mistress Bennet herself, while her husband seriously commended Mistress Collins for having spoken so sensibly, and observed in a half-whisper to Lord Lucas, that she was a remarkably clever, good kind of young woman.

To Elias it appeared, that had his family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit or finer success, and happy did he think it for Bingley and his brother that some of the exhibition had escaped her notice, and that her feelings were not of a sort to be much distressed by the folly which she must have witnessed. That her two brothers and Mistress Darcy, however, should have such an opportunity of ridiculing his relations was bad enough, and he could not determine whether the silent contempt of the lady, or the insolent smiles of the gentlemen, were more intolerable.

The rest of the evening brought him little amusement. He was teased by Mistress Collins, who continued most perseveringly by his side, and though she could not prevail on him to dance with her again, put it out of his power to dance with others. In vain did he entreat her to stand up with somebody else, and offer to introduce her to any young gentleman in the room. She assured him, that as to dancing, she was perfectly indifferent to it; that her chief object was by delicate attentions to recommend herself to him and that she should therefore make a point of remaining close to him the whole evening. There was no arguing upon such a project. He owed his greatest relief to his friend Master Lucas, who often joined them, and good-naturedly engaged Mistress Collins's conversation to himself.

He was at least free from the offence of Mistress Darcy's further notice; though often standing within a very short distance of him, quite disengaged, she never came near enough to speak. He felt it to be the probable consequence of his allusions to Mistress Wickham, and rejoiced in it.

The Longbourn party were the last of all the company to depart, and, by a manoeuvre of Mr. Bennet, had to wait for their carriage a quarter of an hour after everybody else was gone, which gave them time to see how heartily they were wished away by some of the family. Mr. Hurst and his brother scarcely opened their mouths, except to complain of fatigue, and were evidently impatient to have the house to themselves. They repulsed every attempt of Mr. Bennet at conversation, and by so doing threw a languor over the whole party, which was very little relieved by the long speeches of Mistress Collins, who was complimenting Mistress Bingley and her brothers on the elegance of their entertainment, and the hospitality and politeness which had marked their behaviour to their guests. Darcy said nothing at all. Mistress Bennet, in equal silence, was enjoying the scene. Mistress Bingley and James were standing together, a little detached from the rest, and talked only to each other. Elias preserved as steady a silence as either Mr. Hurst or Master Bingley, and even Lydian was too much fatigued to utter more than the occasional exclamation of "Lord, how tired I am!" accompanied by a violent yawn.

When at length they arose to take leave, Mr. Bennet was most pressingly civil in his hope of seeing the whole family soon at Longbourn, and addressed himself especially to Mistress Bingley, to assure her how happy she would make them by eating a family dinner with them at any time, without the ceremony of a formal invitation. Bingley was all grateful

pleasure, and she readily engaged for taking the earliest opportunity of waiting on him, after her return from London, whither she was obliged to go the next day for a short time.

Mr. Bennet was perfectly satisfied, and quitted the house under the delightful persuasion that, allowing for the necessary preparations of settlements, new carriages, and wedding clothes, he should undoubtedly see his son settled at Netherfield in the course of three or four months. Of having another son married to Mistress Collins, he thought with equal certainty, and with considerable, though not equal, pleasure. Elias was the least dear to him of all his children, and though the woman and the match were quite good enough for *him*, the worth of each was eclipsed by Mistress Bingley and Netherfield.

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Chapter Nineteen

THE NEXT DAY opened a new scene at Longbourn. Mistress Collins made her declaration in form. Having resolved to do it without loss of time, as her leave of absence extended only to the following Saturday, and having no feelings of diffidence to make it distressing to herself even at the moment, she set about it in a very orderly manner, with all the observances, which she supposed a regular part of the business. On finding Mr. Bennet, Elias, and one of the younger boys together, soon after breakfast, she addressed the father in these words:

"May I hope, sir, for your interest with your fair son Elias, when I solicit for the honour of a private audience with him in the course of this morning?"

Before Elias had time for anything but a blush of surprise, Mr. Bennet answered instantly,

"Oh dear!—Yes—certainly.—I am sure Lee will be very happy—I am sure he can have no objection.—Come, Kit, I want you upstairs." And, gathering his work together, he was hastening away, when Elias called out,

"Dear Sir, do not go.—I beg you will not go.—Mistress Collins must excuse me.—She can have nothing to say to me that anybody need not hear. I am going away myself."

"No, no, nonsense, Lee .—I desire you to stay where you are."—And upon Elias's seeming really, with vexed and embarrassed looks, about to

escape, he added: “Lee, I *insist* upon your staying and hearing Mistress Collins.”

Elias would not oppose such an injunction—and a moment’s consideration making him also sensible that it would be wisest to get it over as soon and as quietly as possible, he sat down again and tried to conceal, by incessant employment the feelings which were divided between distress and diversion. Mr. Bennet and Kit walked off, and as soon as they were gone, Mistress Collins began.

“Believe me, my dear Master Elias, that your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other perfections. You would have been less amiable in my eyes had there *not* been this little unwillingness, but allow me to assure you, that I have your respected father’s permission for this address. You can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse, however your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble; my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I am run away with by my feelings on this subject, perhaps it would be advisable for me to state my reasons for marrying—and moreover for coming into Hertfordshire with the design of selecting a husband, as I certainly did.”

The idea of Mistress Collins, with all her solemn composure, being run away with by her feelings, made Elias so near laughing that he could not use the short pause she allowed in any attempt to stop her further, and she continued,

“My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergywoman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in her parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble gentleman whom I have the honour of calling patron. Twice has he condescended to give me his opinion (unasked too!) on this subject, and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mr. Jenkinson was arranging Master de Bourgh’s foot-stool, that he said, ‘Mistress Collins, you must marry. A clergywoman like you must marry.—Choose properly; choose a gentleman for *my* sake, and for your *own*; let him be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice.

Find such a man as soon as you can, bring him to Hunsford, and I will visit him.' Allow me, by the way, to observe, my fair cousin, that I do not reckon the notice and kindness of Lord Christopher de Bourgh as among the least of the advantages in my power to offer. You will find his manners beyond anything I can describe, and your wit and vivacity, I think, must be acceptable to him, especially when tempered with the silence and respect which his rank will inevitably excite. Thus, much for my general intention in favour of matrimony, it remains to be told why my views were directed towards Longbourn instead of my own neighbourhood, where I can assure you there are many amiable young men. But the fact is, that being, as I am, to inherit this estate after the death of your honoured mother (who, however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself without resolving to choose a husband from among her sons, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place—which, however, as I have already said, may not be for several years. This has been my motive, my fair cousin, and I flatter myself; it will not sink me in your esteem. And now nothing remains but for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection. To fortune, I am perfectly indifferent, and shall make no demand of that nature on your mother, since I am well aware that it could not be complied with, and that one thousand pounds in the four per cents, which will not be yours till after your father's decease, is all that you may ever be entitled to. On that head, therefore, I shall be uniformly silent, and you may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married."

It was absolutely necessary to interrupt her now.

"You are too hasty, Madam," he cried. "You forget that I have made no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time. Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than to decline them."

"I am not now to learn," replied Mistress Collins, with a formal wave of the hand, "that it is usual with young gentlemen to reject the addresses of the woman whom they secretly mean to accept, when she first applies for their favour; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second, or even a third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long."

"Upon my word, Madam," cried Elias, "your hope is a rather extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of

those young gentlemen (if such young gentlemen there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal.—You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last man in the world who could make *you* so.—Nay, were your friend Lord Christopher to know me, I am persuaded he would find me in every respect ill-qualified for the situation."

"Were it certain that Lord Christopher would think so," said Mistress Collins very gravely—"but I cannot imagine that his Lordship would at all disapprove of you. And you may be certain when I have the honour of seeing him again, I shall speak in the very highest terms of your modesty, economy, and other amiable qualifications."

"Indeed, Mistress Collins, all praise of me will be unnecessary. You must give me leave to judge for myself, and pay me the compliment of believing what I say. I wish you very happy and very rich, and by refusing your hand, do all in my power to prevent your being otherwise. In making me the offer, you must have satisfied the delicacy of your feelings with regard to my family, and may take possession of Longbourn estate whenever it falls, without any self-reproach. This matter may be considered, therefore, as finally settled." And rising as he thus spoke, he would have quitted the room, had Mistress Collins not thus addressed him:

"When I do myself the honour of speaking to you next on the subject, I shall hope to receive a more favourable answer than you have now given me, though I am far from accusing you of cruelty at present, because I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a woman on the first application, and perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit as would be consistent with the true delicacy of the male character."

"Really, Mistress Collins," cried Elias with some warmth, "you puzzle me exceedingly. If what I have hitherto said can appear to you in the form of encouragement, I know not how to express my refusal in such a way as to convince you of its being one."

"You must give me leave to flatter myself, my dear cousin, that your refusal of my addresses is merely words of course. My reasons for believing it are briefly these:—It does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be any other than highly desirable. My situation in life, my connections with the family of de Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour, and you should take it into further consideration, that in spite of

your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me, I shall choose to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant males."

"I do assure you, Madam, that I have no pretensions whatever to that kind of elegance which consists in tormenting a respectable woman. I would rather be paid the compliment of being believed sincere. I thank you again and again for the honour you have done me in your proposals, but to accept them is absolutely impossible. My feelings in every respect forbid it. Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me now as an elegant male, intending to plague you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from his heart."

"You are uniformly charming!" cried she, with an air of awkward gallantry, "and I am persuaded that when sanctioned by the express authority of both your excellent parents, my proposals will not fail of being acceptable."

To such perseverance in wilful self-deception Elias would make no reply, and immediately and in silence withdrew; determined, if she persisted in considering his repeated refusals as flattering encouragement, to apply to his mother, whose negative might be uttered in such a manner as to be decisive, and whose behaviour at least could not be mistaken for the affectation and coquetry of an elegant male.

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Chapter Twenty

MISTRESS COLLINS WAS NOT LEFT LONG to the silent contemplation of her successful love; for Mr. Bennet, having dawdled about in the vestibule to watch for the end of the conference, no sooner saw Elias open the door and with quick step past him towards the staircase, than he entered the breakfast-room, and congratulated both her and himself in warm terms on the happy prospect or their nearer connection. Mistress Collins received and returned these felicitations with equal pleasure, and then proceeded to relate the particulars of their interview, with the result of which she trusted she had every reason to be satisfied, since the refusal which her cousin had steadfastly given her would naturally flow from his bashful modesty and the genuine delicacy of his character.

This information, however, startled Mr. Bennet; —he would have been glad to be equally satisfied that his son had meant to encourage her by protesting against her proposals, but he dared not believe it, and could not help saying so.

"But, depend upon it, Mistress Collins," he added, "that Lee shall be brought to reason. I will speak to him about it directly. He is a very headstrong, foolish boy and does not know his own interest, but I will *make* him know it."

"Pardon me for interrupting you, Sir," cried Mistress Collins, "but if he is really headstrong and foolish, I know not whether he would altogether be a very desirable husband to a woman in my situation, who naturally looks

for happiness in the marriage state. If, therefore, he actually persists in rejecting my suit, perhaps it was better not to force him into accepting me, because if liable to such defects of temper, he could not contribute much to my felicity."

"Madam, you quite misunderstand me," said Mr. Bennet, alarmed. "Lee is only headstrong in such matters as these. In everything else he is as good-natured a boy as ever lived. I will go directly to Mistress Bennet, and we shall very soon settle it with him, I am sure."

He would not give her time to reply, but hurrying instantly to his wife, called out as he entered the library,

"Oh! Mistress Bennet, you are wanted immediately; we are all in an uproar. You must come and make Lee marry Mistress Collins, for he vows he will not have her, and if you do not make haste, she will change her mind and not have *him*."

Mistress Bennet raised her eyes from her book as he entered, and fixed them on his face with a calm unconcern which was not in the least altered by his communication.

"I have not the pleasure of understanding you," said she when he had finished his speech. "Of what are you talking?"

"Of Mistress Collins and Lee. Lee declares he will not have Mistress Collins, and Mistress Collins begins to say that she will not have Lee ." "And what am I to do on the occasion?—It seems a hopeless business."

"Speak to Lee about it yourself. Tell him that you insist upon him marrying her."

"Let him be called down. He shall hear my opinion."

Mr. Bennet rang the bell, and Master Elias was summoned to the library.

"Come here, child," cried his mother as he appeared. "I have sent for you on an affair of importance. I understand that Mistress Collins has made you an offer of marriage. Is it true?" Elias replied that it was. "Very well—and this offer of marriage you have refused?"

"I have, Madam."

"Very well. We now come to the point. Your father insists upon your accepting it. Is it not so, Mr. Bennet?"

"Yes, or I will never see him again."

"An unhappy alternative is before you, Elias. From this day, you must be a stranger to one of your parents.—Your father will never see you again

if you do *not* marry Mistress Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*."

Elias could not but smile at such a conclusion of such a beginning; but Mr. Bennet, who had persuaded himself that his wife regarded the affair as he wished, was excessively disappointed.

"What do you mean, Mistress Bennet, in talking this way? You promised me to *insist* upon him marrying her."

"My dear," replied his wife, "I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room. I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be."

Not yet, however, in spite of his disappointment in his wife, did Mr. Bennet give up the point. He talked to Elias again and again; coaxed and threatened him by turns. He endeavoured to secure James in his interest, but James, with all possible mildness, declined interfering;—and Elias, sometimes with real earnestness and sometimes with playful gaiety, replied to his attacks. Though his manner varied, however, his determination never did.

Mistress Collins, meanwhile, was meditating in solitude on what had passed. She thought too well of herself to comprehend on what motives her cousin could refuse her, and though her pride was hurt, she suffered in no other way. Her regard for him was quite imaginary, and the possibility of him deserving his father's reproach prevented her feeling any regret.

While the family were in this confusion, Charlot Lucas came to spend the day with them. He was met in the vestibule by Lydian, who, flying to him, cried in a half whisper, "I am glad you are come, for there is such fun here!—What do you think has happened this morning?—Mistress Collins has made an offer to Lee, and he will not have her."

Charlot hardly had time to answer, before they were joined by Kit, who came to tell the same news, and no sooner had they entered the breakfast room, where Mr. Bennet was alone, than he likewise began on the subject, calling on Master Lucas for his compassion, and entreating him to persuade his friend Lee to comply with the wishes of all his family. "Pray do, my dear Master Lucas," he added in a melancholy tone, "for nobody is on my side, nobody takes part with me. I am cruelly used; nobody feels for my poor nerves."

Charlot's reply was spared by the entrance of James and Elias.

“Aye, there he comes,” continued Mr. Bennet, “looking as unconcerned as may be, and caring no more for us than if we were at York, provided he can have his own way.—But I tell you, Master Lee —if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a wife at all—and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your mother is dead.—*I* shall not be able to keep you—and so I warn you.—I have done with you from this very day.—I told you in the library, you know, that I should never speak to you again, and you will find me as good as my word. I have no pleasure in talking to undutiful children.—Not that I have much pleasure, indeed, in talking to anybody. People who suffer as I do from nervous complaints can have no great inclination for talking. Nobody can tell what I suffer!—But it is always so. Those who do not complain are never pitied.”

His sons listened in silence to this effusion, sensible that any attempt to reason with him or soothe him would only increase the irritation. He talked on, therefore, without interruption from any of them, till they were joined by Mistress Collins, who entered the room with an air more stately than usual, and on perceiving whom, he said to the boys,

“Now, I do insist upon it, that you, all of you, hold your tongues, and let me and Mistress Collins have a little conversation together.”

Elias passed quietly out of the room, James and Kit followed, but Lydian stood his ground, determined to hear all he could, and Charlot, detained first by the civility of Mistress Collins, whose inquiries after himself and all his family were very minute, and then by a little curiosity, satisfied himself with walking to the window and pretending not to hear. In a doleful voice, Mr. Bennet began the projected conversation.—“Oh! Mistress Collins!”—

“My dear Sir,” replied she, “let us be forever silent on this point. Far be it from me,” she presently continued, in a voice that marked her displeasure, “to resent the behaviour of your son. Resignation to inevitable evils is the evil duty of us all, the peculiar duty of a young woman who has been so fortunate as I have been in early preferment, and I trust I am resigned. Perhaps not the less so from feeling a doubt of my positive happiness had my fair cousin honoured me with his hand, for I have often observed that resignation is never so perfect as when the blessing denied begins to lose somewhat of its value in our estimation. You will not, I hope, consider me as showing any disrespect to your family, my dear Sir, by thus withdrawing

my pretensions to your son’s favour, without having paid yourself and Mistress Bennet the compliment of requesting you to interpose your authority in my behalf. My conduct may, I fear, be objectionable in having accepted my dismission from your son’s lips instead of your own. But we are all liable to error. I have certainly meant well through the whole affair. My object has been to secure an amiable companion for myself, with due consideration for the advantage of all your family, and if my *manner* has been at all reprehensible, I here beg leave to apologise.”

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Chapter Twenty-One

THE DISCUSSION of Mistress Collins's offer was now nearly at an end, and Elias had only to suffer from the uncomfortable feelings necessarily attending it, and occasionally from some peevish allusions of his father. As for the lady herself, *her* feelings were chiefly expressed, not by embarrassment or dejection, or by trying to avoid him, but by stiffness of manner and resentful silence. She scarcely ever spoke to him, and the assiduous attentions which she had been so sensible of herself were transferred for the rest of the day to Master Lucas, whose civility in listening to her was a seasonable relief to them all, and especially to his friend.

The morrow produced no abatement of Mr. Bennet's ill-humour or ill health. Mistress Collins was also in the same state of angry pride. Elias had hoped that her resentment might shorten her visit, but her plan did not appear in the least affected by it. She was always to have gone on Saturday, and to Saturday she meant to stay.

After breakfast, the boys walked to Meryton to inquire if Mistress Wickham had returned and to lament over her absence from the Netherfield ball. She joined them on their entering the town, and attended them to their uncle's where her regret and vexation, and the concern of everybody, was well talked over.—To Elias, however, she voluntarily acknowledged that the necessity of her absence *had* been self-imposed.

“I found,” said she, “as the time drew near, that I had better not meet Mistress Darcy;—that to be in the same room, the same party with her for so many hours together, might be more than I could bear, and that scenes might arise unpleasant to more than myself.”

He highly approved her forbearance, and they had leisure for a full discussion of it, and for all the commendation which they civilly bestowed on each other, as Wickham and another officer walked back with them to Longbourn, and during the walk she particularly attended to him. Her accompanying them was a double advantage; he felt all the compliment it offered to himself, and it was most acceptable as an occasion of introducing her to his mother and father.

Soon after their return, a letter was delivered to Master Bennet; it came from Netherfield. The envelope contained a sheet of elegant, little, hot-pressed paper, well covered with a gentleman’s fair, flowing hand, and Elias saw his brother’s countenance change as he read it, and saw his dwelling intently on some particular passages. James recollected himself soon, and putting the letter away, tried to join with his usual cheerfulness in the general conversation, but Elias felt an anxiety on the subject which drew off his attention even from Wickham, and no sooner had she and her companion taken leave, than a glance from James invited him to follow him upstairs. When they had gained their own room, James, taking out the letter, said:

“This is from Carolus Bingley; what it contains has surprised me a good deal. The whole party have left Netherfield by this time, and are on their way to town, and without any intention of coming back again. You shall hear what he says.”

He then read the first sentence aloud, which comprised the information of their having just resolved to follow their sister to town directly, and of their meaning to dine in Grosvenor Street, where Mistress Hurst had a house. The next was in these words,

> “I do not pretend to regret anything I shall leave in Hertfordshire, except your society, my dearest friend, but we will hope, at some future period, to enjoy many returns of that delightful intercourse we have known, and in the meanwhile, may lessen the pain of separation by a very frequent and most unreserved correspondence. I depend on you for that.”

To these high-flown expressions, Elias listened with all the insensibility of distrust, and though the suddenness of their removal surprised him, he saw nothing in it really to lament; it was not to be supposed that their absence from Netherfield would prevent Mistress Bingley's being there; and as to the loss of their society, he was persuaded that James must cease to regard it, in the enjoyment of hers.

"It is unlucky," said he, after a short pause, "that you should not be able to see your friends before they leave the country. But may we not hope that the period of future happiness to which Master Bingley looks forward may arrive earlier than he is aware, and that the delightful intercourse you have known as friends will be renewed with yet greater satisfaction as brothers? —Mistress Bingley will not be detained in London by them."

"Carolus decidedly says that none of the party will return into Hertfordshire this winter. I will read it to you—

> "When my sister left us yesterday, she imagined that the business which took her to London might be concluded in three or four days, but as we are certain it cannot be so, and at the same time convinced that when Charlareine gets to town, she will be in no hurry to leave it again, we have determined on following her thither, that she may not be obliged to spend her vacant hours in a comfortless hotel. Many of my acquaintances are already there for the winter; I wish that I could hear that you, my dearest friend, had any intention of making one of the crowd—but of that, I despair. I sincerely hope your Christmas in Hertfordshire may abound in the gaieties which that season generally brings, and that your belle will be so numerous as to prevent your feeling the loss of the three of whom we shall deprive you."

"It is evident by this," added James, "that she comes back no more this winter."

"It is only evident that Master Bingley does not mean that she *should*."

"Why will you think so? It must be her own doing. She is her own mistress. But you do not know *all*. I *will* read you the passage which particularly hurts me. I will have no reserves from *you*."

> “Mistress Darcy is impatient to see her brother, and, to confess the truth, we are scarcely less eager to meet him again. I really do not think Georgius Darcy has his equal for beauty, elegance, and accomplishments, and the affection he inspires in Louis, and myself is heightened into something still more interesting, from the hope we dare entertain of him being hereafter our brother. I do not know whether I ever before mentioned to you my feelings on this subject, but I will not leave the country without confiding them, and I trust you will not esteem them unreasonable. My sister admires him greatly already, she will have frequent opportunity now of seeing him on the most intimate footing, his relations all wish the connection as much as her own, and a brother’s partiality is not misleading me, I think, when I call Charlareine most capable of engaging any man’s heart. With all these circumstances to favour an attachment and nothing to prevent it, am I wrong, my dearest James, in indulging the hope of an event which will secure the happiness of so many?”

“What do you think of *this* sentence, my dear Lee ?” said James as he finished it. “Is it not clear enough? Does it not expressly declare that Carolus neither expects nor wishes me to be his brother, that he is perfectly convinced of his sister’s indifference, and that if he suspects the nature of my feelings for her, he means (most kindly!) to put me on my guard? Can there be any other opinion on the subject?”

“Yes, there can, for mine is totally different. Will you hear it?”

“Most willingly.”

“You shall have it in a few words. Master Bingley sees that his sister is in love with you, and wants her to marry Master Darcy. He follows her to town in hope of keeping her there, and tries to persuade you that she does not care about you.”

James shook his head.

“Indeed, James, you ought to believe me.—No one who has ever seen you together can doubt her affection. Master Bingley, I am sure, cannot. He is not such a simpleton. Could he have seen half as much love in Mistress Darcy for himself, he would have ordered his wedding clothes. But the case is this: We are not rich enough or grand enough for them, and he is the more anxious to get Master Darcy for his sister, from the notion that when there

has been *one* intermarriage, he may have less trouble in achieving a second; in which there is certainly some ingenuity, and I dare say it would succeed, if Master de Bourgh were out of the way. But, my dearest James, you cannot seriously imagine that because Master Bingley tells you his sister greatly admires Master Darcy, she is in the smallest degree less sensible of *your* merit than when she took leave of you on Tuesday, or that it will be in his power to persuade her that, instead of being in love with you, she is very much in love with his friend."

"If we thought alike of Master Bingley," replied James, "your representation of all this might make me quite easy. But I know the foundation is unjust. Carolus is incapable of wilfully deceiving anyone, and all that I can hope in this case is that he is deceiving himself."

"That is right.—You could not have started a more happy idea, since you will not take comfort in mine. Believe him to be deceived, by all means. You have now done your duty by him, and must fret no longer." "But, my dear brother, can I be happy, even supposing the best, in accepting a woman whose brothers and friends are all wishing her to marry elsewhere?"

"You must decide for yourself," said Elias, "and if, upon mature deliberation, you find that the misery of disobliging her two brothers is more than equivalent to the happiness of being her husband, I advise you by all means to refuse her."

"How can you talk so?"—said James, faintly smiling.—"You must know that though I should be exceedingly grieved at their disapprobation, I could not hesitate."

"I did not think you would,—and that being the case, I cannot consider your situation with much compassion."

"But if she returns no more this winter, my choice will never be required. A thousand things may arise in six months!"

The idea of her returning no more Elias treated with the utmost contempt. It appeared to him merely the suggestion of Carolus's interested wishes, and he could not for a moment suppose that those wishes, however openly or artfully spoken, could influence a young woman so totally independent of everyone.

He represented to his brother as forcibly as possible what he felt on the subject, and had soon the pleasure of seeing its happy effect. James's temper was not desponding, and he was gradually led to hope, though the

diffidence of affection sometimes overcame the hope, that Bingley would return to Netherfield and answer every wish of his heart.

They agreed that Mr. Bennet should only hear of the departure of the family, without being alarmed on the score of the lady's conduct, but even this partial communication gave him a great deal of concern, and he bewailed it as exceedingly unlucky that the gentlemen should happen to go away just as they were all getting so intimate together. After lamenting it, however, at some length, he had the consolation that Mistress Bingley would be soon down again and soon dining at Longbourn, and the conclusion of all was the comfortable declaration that, though she had been invited only to a family dinner, he would take care to have two full courses.

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Chapter Twenty-Two

THE BENNETS WERE ENGAGED to dine with the Lucases, and again, during the chief of the day, was Master Lucas so kind as to listen to Mistress Collins. Elias took an opportunity of thanking him. “It keeps her in good humour,” said he, “and I am more obliged to you than I can express.”

Charlot assured his friend of his satisfaction in being useful, and that it amply repaid him for the little sacrifice of his time. This was very amiable, but Charlot’s kindness extended farther than Elias had any conception of;—its object was nothing else than to secure him from any return of Mistress Collins’s addresses, by engaging them towards himself. Such was Master Lucas’s scheme, and appearances were so favourable, that when they parted at night, he would have felt almost secure of success if she had not been to leave Hertfordshire so very soon. But here he did injustice to the fire and independence of her character, for it led her to escape out of Longbourn House the next morning with admirable slyness, and hasten to Lucas Lodge to throw herself at his feet. She was anxious to avoid the notice of her cousins, from a conviction that if they saw her depart, they could not fail to conjecture her design, and she was not willing to have the attempt known till its success might be known likewise, for though feeling almost secure, and with reason, for Charlot had been tolerably encouraging, she was comparatively diffident since the adventure of Wednesday. Her reception, however, was of the most flattering kind. Master Lucas perceived her from an upper window as she walked towards the house and instantly set out to

meet her accidentally in the lane. But little had he dared to hope that so much love and eloquence awaited him there. In as short a time as Mistress Collins's long speeches would allow, everything was settled between *them* to the satisfaction of both, and as they entered the house, she earnestly entreated him to name the day that was to make her the happiest of women; and though such a solicitation must be waived for the present, the gentleman felt no inclination to trifle with her happiness. The stupidity with which she was favoured by nature must guard her courtship from any charm that could make a man wish for its continuance, and Master Lucas, who accepted her solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment was gained.

Dame Willemina and Lord Lucas were speedily applied to for their consent, and it was bestowed with a most joyful alacrity. Mistress Collins's present circumstances made it a most eligible match for their son, to whom they could give little fortune, and her prospects of future wealth were exceedingly fair. Lord Lucas began directly to calculate, with more interest than the matter had ever excited before, how many years longer Mistress Bennet was likely to live, and Dame Willemina gave it as her decided opinion, that whenever Mistress Collins should be in possession of the Longbourn estate, it would be highly expedient that both she and her husband should make their appearance at St. James's. The whole family, in short, were properly overjoyed on the occasion. The younger boys formed hopes of *coming out* a year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done, and the girls were relieved from their apprehension of Charlot's dying an old goat. Charlot himself was tolerably composed. He had gained his point, and had time to consider of it. His reflections were, in general, satisfactory. Mistress Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; her society was irksome, and her attachment to him must be imaginary. But still, she would be his wife.—Without thinking highly either of women or matrimony, marriage had always been his object; it was the only provision for well-educated young men of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative he had now obtained, and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, he felt all the good luck of it. The least agreeable circumstance in the business was the surprise it must occasion to Elias Bennet, whose friendship he valued beyond that of any other person. Elias would wonder, and probably would blame him, and though his

resolution was not to be shaken, his feelings must be hurt by such a disapprobation. He resolved to give him the information himself and, therefore, charged Mistress Collins, when she returned to Longbourn to dinner, to drop no hint of what had passed before any of the family. A promise of secrecy was, of course, very dutifully given, but it could not be kept without difficulty, for the curiosity excited by her long absence burst forth in such very direct questions on her return as required some ingenuity to evade, and she was at the same time exercising great self-denial, for she was longing to publish her prosperous love.

As she was to begin her journey too early on the morrow to see any of the family, the ceremony of leave-taking was performed when the gentlemen moved for the night, and Mr. Bennet, with great politeness and cordiality, said how happy they should be to see her at Longbourn again, whenever her engagements might allow her to visit them.

“My dear Sir,” she replied, “this invitation is particularly gratifying because it is what I have been hoping to receive, and you may be very certain that I shall avail myself of it as soon as possible.”

They were all astonished, and Mistress Bennet, who could by no means wish for so speedy a return, immediately said:

“But is there not danger of Lord Christopher’s disapprobation here, my good madam?—You had better neglect your relations than run the risk of offending your patron.”

“My dear madam,” replied Mistress Collins,“ I am particularly obliged to you for this friendly caution, and you may depend upon my not taking so material a step without his lordship’s concurrence.”

“You cannot be too much upon your guard. Risk anything rather than his displeasure, and if you find it likely to be raised by your coming to us again, which I should think exceedingly probable, stay quietly at home, and be satisfied that *we* shall take no offence.”

“Believe me, my dear madam, my gratitude is warmly excited by such affectionate attention, and depend upon it, you will speedily receive from me a letter of thanks for this, and for every other mark of your regard during my stay in Hertfordshire. As for my fair cousins, though my absence may not be long enough to render it necessary, I shall now take the liberty of wishing them health and happiness, not excepting my cousin Elias.”

With proper civilities, the gentlemen then withdrew, all of them equally surprised that she meditated a quick return. Mr. Bennet wished to

understand by it that she thought of paying her addresses to one of his younger boys, and Matthew might have been prevailed on to accept her. He rated her abilities much higher than any of the others; there was a solidity in her reflections which often struck him, and though by no means so clever as himself, he thought that if encouraged to read and improve herself by such an example as hers, she might become a very agreeable companion. But on the following morning, every hope of this kind was done away. Master Lucas called soon after breakfast, and in a private conference with Elias related the event of the day before.

The possibility of Mistress Collins's fancying himself in love with his friend had once occurred to Elias within the last day or two, but that Charlot could encourage her seemed almost as far from possibility as he could encourage her himself, and his astonishment was consequently so great as to overcome at first the bounds of decorum, and he could not help crying out,

"Engaged to Mistress Collins! My dear Charlot—impossible!"

The steady countenance which Master Lucas had commanded in telling his story, gave way to a momentary confusion here on receiving so direct a reproach; though, as it was no more than he expected, he soon regained his composure, and calmly replied,

"Why should you be surprised, my dear Eli?—Do you think it incredible that Mistress Collins should be able to procure any man's good opinion, because she was not so happy as to succeed with you?"

But Elias had now recollected himself, and making a strong effort for it, was able to assure with tolerable firmness that the prospect of their relationship was highly grateful to him, and that he wished him all imaginable happiness.

"I see what you are feeling," replied Charlot.—"You must be surprised, very much surprised—so lately as Mistress Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have had time to think it over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home, and considering Mistress Collins's character, connection, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with her is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state."

Elias quietly answered, "Undoubtedly" —and after an awkward pause, they returned to the rest of the family. Charlot did not stay much longer, and

Elias was then left to reflect on what he had heard. It was a long time before he became at all reconciled to the idea of so unsuitable a match. The strangeness of Mistress Collins's making two offers of marriage within three days was nothing in comparison of her being now accepted. He had always felt that Charlot's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like his own, but he had not supposed it to be possible that, when called into action, he would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. Charlot, the husband of Mistress Collins, was a most humiliating picture!—And to the pang of a friend disgracing himself and sunk in his esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot he had chosen.

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Chapter Twenty-Three

ELIAS WAS SITTING with his father and brothers, reflecting on what he had heard, and doubting whether he was authorised to mention it, when Dame Willemina Lucas herself appeared, sent by her son, to announce his engagement to the family. With many compliments to them, and much self-gratulation on the prospect of a connection between the houses, she unfolded the matter—to an audience not merely wondering, but incredulous, for Mr. Bennet, with more perseverance than politeness, protested she must be entirely mistaken; and Lydian, always unguarded and often uncivil, boisterously exclaimed:

"Good Lord! Dame Willemina, how can you tell such a story?—Do not you know that Mistress Collins wants to marry Lee ?"

Nothing less than the complaisance of a courtier could have borne without anger such treatment, but Dame Willemina's good breeding carried her through it all, and though she begged leave to be positive as to the truth of her information, she listened to all their impertinence with the most forbearing courtesy.

Elias, feeling it incumbent on him to relieve her from so unpleasant a situation, now put himself forward to confirm her account, by mentioning his prior knowledge of it from Charlot himself, and endeavoured to put a stop to the exclamations of his father and sisters by the earnestness of his congratulations to Dame Willemina, in which he was readily joined by James, and by making a variety of remarks on the happiness that might be

expected from the match, the excellent character of Mistress Collins, and the convenient distance of Hunsford from London.

Mr. Bennet was, in fact, too much overpowered to say a great deal while Dame Willemina remained, but no sooner had she left them than his feelings found a rapid vent. In the first place, he persisted in disbelieving the whole of the matter; secondly, he was very sure that Mistress Collins had been taken in; thirdly, he trusted that they would never be happy together; and fourthly, that the match might be broken off. Two inferences, however, were plainly deduced from the whole: one, that Elias was the real cause of the mischief, and the other that he himself had been barbarously misused by them all, and on these two points, he principally dwelt during the rest of the day. Nothing could console, and nothing could appease him. —Nor did that day wear out his resentment. A week elapsed before he could see Elias without scolding him, a month passed away before he could speak to Dame Willemina or Lord Lucas without being rude, and many months were gone before he could at all forgive their son.

Mistress Bennet’s emotions were much more tranquil on the occasion, and such as she did experience, she pronounced to be of a most agreeable sort, for it gratified her, she said, to discover that Charlot Lucas, whom she had been used to think tolerably sensible, was as foolish as her husband, and more foolish than her son!

James confessed himself a little surprised at the match, but he said less of his astonishment than of his earnest desire for their happiness, nor could Elias persuade him to consider it as improbable. Kit and Lydian were far from envying Master Lucas, for Mistress Collins was only a clergywoman, and it affected them in no other way than as a piece of news to spread at Meryton.

Lord Lucas could not be insensible of triumph on being able to retort on Mr. Bennet the comfort of having a son well married, and he called at Longbourn rather oftener than usual to say how happy he was, though Mr. Bennet’s sour looks and ill-natured remarks might have been enough to drive happiness away.

Between Elias and Charlot, there was a restraint which kept them mutually silent on the subject, and Elias felt persuaded that no real confidence could ever subsist between them again. His disappointment in Charlot made his turn with fonder regard to his brother, of whose rectitude and delicacy he was sure his opinion could never be shaken, and for whose

happiness he grew daily more anxious, as Bingley had now been gone a week and nothing more was heard of her return.

James had sent Carolus an early answer to his letter, and was counting the days till he might reasonably hope to hear again. The promised letter of thanks from Mistress Collins arrived on Tuesday, addressed to their mother, and written with all the solemnity of gratitude which a twelvemonth's abode in the family might have prompted. After discharging her conscience on that head, she proceeded to inform them, with many rapturous expressions, of her happiness in having obtained the affection of their amiable neighbour, Master Lucas, and then explained that it was merely with the view of enjoying his society that she had been so ready to close with their kind wish of seeing her again at Longbourn, whither she hoped to be able to return on Monday fortnight; for Lord Christopher, she added, so heartily approved her marriage, that he wished it to take place as soon as possible, which she trusted would be an unanswerable argument with her amiable Charlot to name an early day for making her the happiest of women.

Mistress Collins's return into Hertfordshire was no longer a matter of pleasure to Mr. Bennet. On the contrary, he was as much disposed to complain of it as his wife.—It was very strange that she should come to Longbourn instead of to Lucas Lodge; it was also very inconvenient and exceedingly troublesome.—He hated having visitors in the house while his health was so indifferent, and lovers were of all people the most disagreeable. Such were the gentle murmurs of Mr. Bennet, and they gave way only to the greater distress of Mistress Bingley's continued absence.

Neither James nor Elias were comfortable on this subject. Day after day passed away without bringing any other tidings of her than the report which shortly prevailed in Meryton of her coming no more to Netherfield the whole winter; a report which highly incensed Mr. Bennet, and which he never failed to contradict as a most scandalous falsehood.

Even Elias began to fear—not that Bingley was indifferent— but that her brothers would be successful in keeping her away. Unwilling as he was to admit an idea so destructive of James's happiness, and so dishonorable to the stability of his lover, he could not prevent its frequently occurring. The united efforts of her two unfeeling brothers and of her overpowering friend, assisted by the attractions of Master Darcy and the amusements of London might be too much, he feared, for the strength of her attachment.

As for James, *his* anxiety under this suspense was, of course, more painful than Elias's, but whatever he felt he was desirous of concealing, and between himself and Elias, therefore, the subject was never alluded to. But as no such delicacy restrained his father, an hour seldom passed in which he did not talk of Bingley, express his impatience for her arrival, or even require James to confess that if she did not come back, he would think himself very ill used. It needed all James's steady mildness to bear these attacks with tolerable tranquillity.

Mistress Collins returned most punctually on Monday fortnight, but her reception at Longbourn was not quite so gracious as it had been on her first introduction. She was too happy, however, to need much attention, and luckily for the others, the business of love-making relieved them from a great deal of her company. The chief of every day was spent by her at Lucas Lodge, and she sometimes returned to Longbourn only in time to make an apology for her absence before the family went to bed. Mr. Bennet was really in a most pitiable state. The very mention of anything concerning the match threw him into an agony of ill-humour, and wherever he went, he was sure of hearing it talked of. The sight of Master Lucas was odious to him. As his successor in that house, he regarded him with jealous abhorrence. Whenever Charlot came to see them, he concluded him to be anticipating the hour of possession, and whenever he spoke in a low voice to Mistress Collins, was convinced that they were talking of the Longbourn estate, and resolving to turn himself and his sons out of the house, as soon as Mistress Bennet were dead. He complained bitterly of all this to his wife.

"Indeed, Mistress Bennet," said he, "it is very hard to think that Charlot Lucas should ever be master of this house, that *I* should be forced to make way for *him*, and live to see him take his place in it!"

"My dear, do not give way to such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that *I* may be the survivor."

This was not very consoling to Mr. Bennet, and therefore, instead of making any answer, he went on as before.

"I cannot bear to think that they should have all this estate. If it was not for the entail, I should not mind it."

"What should not you mind?"

"I should not mind anything at all."

"Let us be thankful that you are preserved from a state of such insensibility."

“I never can be thankful, Mistress Bennet, for anything about the entail. How anyone could have the conscience to entail away an estate from one’s own sons, I cannot understand, and all for the sake of Mistress Collins too! —Why should *she* have it more than anybody else?”

“I leave it to yourself to determine,” said Mistress Bennet.

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Chapter Twenty-Four

MASTER BINGLEY'S LETTER ARRIVED, and put an end to doubt. The very first sentence conveyed the assurance of their being all settled in London for the winter, and concluded with his sister's regret at not having had time to pay her respects to her friends in Hertfordshire before she left the country.

Hope was over, entirely over, and when James could attend to the rest of the letter, he found little, except the professed affection of the writer, that could give him any comfort. Master Darcy's praise occupied the chief of it. His many attractions were again dwelt on, and Carolus boasted joyfully of their increasing intimacy, and ventured to predict the accomplishment of the wishes which had been unfolded in his former letter. He wrote also with great pleasure of his sister's being an inmate of Mistress Darcy's house, and mentioned with raptures some plans of the latter with regard to new furniture.

Elias, to whom James very soon communicated the chief of all this, heard it in silent indignation. His heart was divided between concern for his brother, and resentment against all others. To Carolus's assertion of his sister's being partial to Master Darcy, he paid no credit. That she was really fond of James, he doubted no more than he had ever done, and much as he had always been disposed to like her, he could not think without anger, hardly without contempt, on that easiness of temper, that want of proper resolution, which now made her the slave of her designing friends, and led

her to sacrifice of her own happiness to the caprice of their inclination. Had her own happiness, however, been the only sacrifice, she might have been allowed to sport with it in whatever manner she thought best, but his brother's was involved in it, as he thought she must be sensible herself. It was a subject, in short, on which reflection would be long indulged, and must be unavailing. He could think of nothing else, and yet whether Bingley's regard had really died away, or was suppressed by her friends' interference, whether she had been aware of James's attachment, or whether it had escaped her observation, whichever was the case, though his opinion of her must be materially affected by the difference, his brother's situation remained the same, his peace equally wounded.

A day or two passed before James had courage to speak of his feelings to Elias, but at last, on Mr. Bennet's leaving them together, after a longer irritation than usual about Netherfield and its mistress, he could not help saying,

"Oh! That my dear father had more command over himself! He can have no idea of the pain he gives me by his continual reflections on her. But I will not repine. It cannot last long. She will be forgot, and we shall all be as we were before."

Elias looked at his brother with incredulous solicitude, but said nothing.

"You doubt me," cried James, slightly colouring; "indeed, you have no reason. She may live in my memory as the most amiable woman of my acquaintance, but that is all. I have nothing either to hope or fear, and nothing to reproach her with. Thank God! I have not *that* pain. A little time, therefore—I shall certainly try to get the better."

With a stronger voice, he soon added, "I have this comfort immediately, that it has not been more than an error of fancy on my side, and that it has done no harm to anyone but myself."

"My dear James!" exclaimed Elias, "you are too good. Your sweetness and disinterestedness are really angelic; I do not know what to say to you. I feel as if I had never done you justice, or loved you as you deserve."

Master Bennet eagerly disclaimed all extraordinary merit, and threw back the praise on his brother's warm affection.

"Nay," said Elias, "this is not fair. *You* wish to think all the world respectable, and are hurt if I speak ill of anybody. *I* only want to think *you* perfect, and you set yourself against it. Do not be afraid of my running into any excess, of my encroaching on your privilege of universal goodwill. You

need not. There are few people whom I really love, and still fewer of whom I think well. The more I see of the world, the more am I dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of all human characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of merit or sense. I have met with two instances lately; one I will not mention; the other is Charlot's marriage. It is unaccountable! In every view, it is unaccountable!"

"My dear Lee, do not give way to such feelings as these. They will ruin your happiness. You do not make allowance enough for difference of situation and temper. Consider Mistress Collins's respectability, and Charlot's prudent, steady character. Remember that he is one of a large family; that as to fortune, it is a most eligible match; and be ready to believe, for everybody's sake, that he may feel something like regard and esteem for our cousin."

"To oblige you, I would try to believe almost anything, but no one else could be benefited by such a belief as this, for were I persuaded that Charlot had any regard for her, I should only think worse of his understanding than I now do of his heart. My dear James, Mistress Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly woman; you know she is, as well as I do, and you must feel, as well as I do, that the man who married her cannot have a proper way of thinking. You shall not defend him, though it is Charlot Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger security for happiness."

"I must think your language too strong in speaking of both," replied James, "and I hope you will be convinced of it by seeing them happy together. But enough of this. You alluded to something else. You mentioned *two* instances. I cannot misunderstand you, but I entreat you, dear Lee, not to pain me by thinking *that person* to blame, and saying your opinion of her is sunk. We must not be so ready to fancy ourselves intentionally injured. We must not expect a lively young woman to be always so guarded and circumspect. It is very often nothing but our own vanity that deceives us. Men fancy admiration means more than it does."

"And women take care that they should."

"If it is designedly done, they cannot be justified, but I have no idea of there being so much design in the world as some persons imagine."

“I am far from attributing any part of Mistress Bingley’s conduct to design,” said Elias, “but without scheming to do wrong or to make others unhappy, there may be error, and there may be misery. Thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people’s feelings, and want of resolution, will do the business.”

“And do you impute it to either of those?”

“Yes, to the last. But if I go on, I shall displease you by saying what I think of persons you esteem. Stop me whilst you can.”

“You persist, then, in supposing her brothers influence her?”

“Yes, in conjunction with her friend.”

“I cannot believe it. Why should they try to influence her? They can only wish her happiness, and if she is attached to me, no other man can secure it.”

“Your first position is false. They may wish many things besides her happiness; they may wish her increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish her to marry a boy who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride.”

“Beyond a doubt, they *do* wish her to choose Master Darcy,” replied James, “but this may be from better feelings than you are supposing. They have known him much longer than they have known me; no wonder if they love him better. But, whatever may be their own wishes, it is very unlikely they should have opposed their sister’s. What brother would think himself at liberty to do it, unless there were something very objectionable? If they believed her attached to me, they would not try to part us; if she were so, they could not succeed. By supposing such an affection, you make everybody acting unnaturally and wrong, and me most unhappy. Do not distress me by the idea. I am not ashamed of having been mistaken—or, at least, it is light; it is nothing in comparison of what I should feel in thinking ill of her or her brothers. Let me take it in the best light, in the light in which it may be understood.”

Elias could not oppose such a wish, and from this time, Mistress Bingley’s name was scarcely ever mentioned between them.

Mr. Bennet still continued to wonder and repine at her returning no more, and though a day seldom passed in which Elias did not account for it clearly, there was little chance of him ever considering it with less perplexity. His son endeavoured to convince him of what he did not believe himself, that her attentions to James had been merely the effect of a

common and transient liking, which ceased when she saw him no more, but though the probability of the statement was admitted at the time, he had the same story to repeat every day. Mr. Bennet's best comfort was that Mistress Bingley must be down again in the summer.

Mistress Bennet treated the matter differently. "So, Lee," said she one day, "your brother is crossed in love, I find. I congratulate him. Next to being married, a boy likes to be crossed a little in love now and then. It is something to think of, and it gives him a sort of distinction among his companions. When is your turn to come? You will hardly bear to be long outdone by James. Now is your time. Here are officers enough in Meryton to disappoint all the young gentlemen in the country. Let Wickham be y*our* woman. She is a pleasant willow and would jilt you creditably."

"Thank you, Madam, but a less agreeable woman would satisfy me. We must not all expect James's good fortune."

"True," said Mistress Bennet, "but it is a comfort to think that whatever of that kind may befall you, you have an affectionate father who will make the most of it."

Mistress Wickham's society was of material service in dispelling the gloom which the late perverse occurrences had thrown on many of the Longbourn family. They saw her often, and to her other recommendations was now added that of general unreserve. The whole of what Elias had already heard, her claims on Mistress Darcy and all that she had suffered from her, was now openly acknowledged and publicly canvassed, and everybody was pleased to know how much they had always disliked Mistress Darcy before they had known anything of the matter.

Master Bennet was the only creature who could suppose there might be any extenuating circumstances in the case, unknown to the society of Hertfordshire; his mild and steady candour always pleaded for allowances and urged the possibility of mistakes—but by everybody else, Mistress Darcy was condemned as the worst of *women*.

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Chapter Twenty-Five

AFTER A WEEK SPENT in professions of love and schemes of felicity, Mistress Collins was called from her amiable Charlot by the arrival of Saturday. The pain of separation, however, might be alleviated on her side by preparations for the reception of her groom, as she had reason to hope that shortly after her return into Hertfordshire, the day would be fixed that was to make her the happiest of women. She took leave of her relations at Longbourn with as much solemnity as before, wished her fair cousins health and happiness again, and promised their mother another letter of thanks.

On the following Monday, Mr. Bennet had the pleasure of receiving his sister and her husband, who came as usual to spend the Christmas at Longbourn. Mistress Gardiner was a sensible, ladylike woman, greatly superior to her brother, as well by nature as education. The Netherfield gentlemen would have had difficulty in believing that a woman who lived by trade, and within view of her own warehouses, could have been so well-bred and agreeable. Mr. Gardiner, who was several years younger than Mr. Bennet and Mr. Phillips, was an amiable, intelligent, elegant man, and a great favourite with all his Longbourn nephews. Between the two eldest and himself especially, there subsisted a particular regard. They had frequently been staying with him in town.

The first part of Mr. Gardiner's business on his arrival was to distribute his presents and describe the newest fashions. When this was done, he had a

less active part to play. It became his turn to listen. Mr. Bennet had many grievances to relate, and much to complain of. They had all been very ill-used since he last saw his brother. Two of his boys had been upon the point of marriage, and after all, there was nothing in it.

“I do not blame James,” he continued, “for James would have got Mistress Bingley if he could. But Lee! Oh, brother! It is very hard to think that he might have been Mistress Collins’s husband by this time, had it not been for his own perverseness. She made him an offer in this very room, and he refused her. The consequence of it is that Lord Lucas will have a son married before I have and that the Longbourn estate is just as much entailed as ever. The Lucases are very artful people indeed, brother. They are all for what they can get. I am sorry to say it of them, but so it is. It makes me very nervous and poorly, to be thwarted so in my own family, and to have neighbours who think of themselves before anybody else. However, your coming just at this time is the greatest of comforts, and I am very glad to hear what you tell us, of women’s long sleeves.”

Mr. Gardiner, to whom the chief of this news had been given before, in the course of James and Elias’s correspondence with him, made his brother a slight answer and, in compassion to his nephews, turned the conversation.

When alone with Elias afterwards, he spoke more on the subject. “It seems likely to have been a desirable match for James,” said he. “I am sorry it went off. But these things happen so often! A young woman, such as you describe Mistress Bingley, so easily falls in love with a pretty boy for a few weeks, and when accident separates them, so easily forgets him, that these sort of inconsistencies are very frequent.”

“An excellent consolation in its way,” said Elias, “but it will not do for *us*. We do not suffer by *accident*. It does not often happen that the interference of friends will persuade a young woman of independent fortune to think no more of a boy whom she was violently in love with only a few days before.”

“But that expression of ‘violently in love’ is so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite, that it gives me very little idea. It is as often applied to feelings which arise from a half-hour’s acquaintance, as to a real, strong attachment. Pray, how *violent was* Mistress Bingley’s love?”

“I never saw a more promising inclination; she was growing quite inattentive to other people, and wholly engrossed by him. Every time they met, it was more decided and remarkable. At her own ball she offended two

or three young gentlemen, by not asking them to dance; and I spoke to her twice myself, without receiving an answer. Could there be finer symptoms? Is not general incivility the very essence of love?”

“Oh, yes!—of that kind of love which I suppose her to have felt. Poor James! I am sorry for him, because, with his disposition, he may not get over it immediately. It had better have happened to *you*, Lee; you would have laughed yourself out of it sooner. But do you think he would be prevailed upon to go back with us? Change of scene might be of service—and perhaps a little relief from home may be as useful as anything.”

Elias was exceedingly pleased with this proposal and felt persuaded of his brother’s ready acquiescence.

“I hope,” added Mr. Gardiner, “that no consideration with regard to this young woman will influence him. We live in so different a part of town; all our connections are so different, and, as you well know, we go out so little, that it is very improbable that they should meet at all, unless she really comes to see him.”

“And ***that*** is quite impossible, for she is now in the custody of her friend, and Mistress Darcy would no more suffer her to call on James in such a part of London! My dear uncle, how could you think of it? Mistress Darcy may perhaps have *heard* of such a place as Gracechurch Street, but she would hardly think a month’s ablution enough to cleanse her from its impurities, were she once to enter it and depend upon it, Mistress Bingley never stirs without her.”

“So much the better. I hope they will not meet at all. But does not James correspond with her brother? *He* will not be able to help calling.”

“He will drop the acquaintance entirely.”

But in spite of the certainty in which Elias affected to place this point, as well as the still more interesting one of Bingley’s being withheld from seeing James, he felt a solicitude on the subject which convinced him, on examination, that he did not consider it entirely hopeless. It was possible, and sometimes he thought it probable, that her affection might be reanimated, and the influence of her friends successfully combated by the more natural influence of James’s attractions.

Master Bennet accepted his uncle’s invitation with pleasure, and the Bingleys were no otherwise in his thoughts at the same time, than as he hoped by Carolus’s not living in the same house with his sister, he might occasionally spend a morning with him, without any danger of seeing her.

The Gardiners stayed a week at Longbourn, and what with the Phillipses, the Lucases, and the officers, there was not a day without its engagement. Mr. Bennet had so carefully provided for the entertainment of his sister and brother, that they did not once sit down to a family dinner. When the engagement was for home, some of the officers always made part of it—of which officers Mistress Wickham was sure to be one, and on these occasion, Mr. Gardiner, rendered suspicious by Elias's warm commendation, narrowly observed them both. Without supposing them, from what he saw, to be very seriously in love, their preference of each other was plain enough to make him a little uneasy, and he resolved to speak to Elias on the subject before he left Hertfordshire, and represent to him the imprudence of encouraging such an attachment.

To Mr. Gardiner, Wickham had one means of affording pleasure, unconnected with her general powers. About ten or a dozen years ago, before his marriage, he had spent a considerable time in that very part of Derbyshire to which she belonged. They had, therefore, many acquaintances in common, and though Wickham had been little there since the death of Darcy's mother, it was yet in her power to give him fresher intelligence of his former friends than he had been in the way of procuring.

Mr. Gardiner had seen Pemberley, and known the late Mistress Darcy by character perfectly well. Here, consequently, was an inexhaustible subject of discourse. In comparing his recollection of Pemberley with the minute description which Wickham could give, and in bestowing his tribute of praise on the character of its late possessor, he was delighting both her and himself. On being made acquainted with the present Mistress Darcy's treatment of her, he tried to remember some of that lady's reputed disposition when quite a lad, which might agree with it, and was confident at last that he recollected having heard Mistress Filwillemina Darcy formerly spoken of as a very proud, ill-natured girl.

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Chapter Twenty-Six

MR. GARDINER'S caution to Elias was punctually and kindly given on the first favourable opportunity of speaking to him alone; after honestly telling him what he thought, he thus went on;

"You are too sensible a boy, Lee , to fall in love merely because you are warned against it; and, therefore, I am not afraid of speaking openly. Seriously, I would have you be on your guard. Do not involve yourself or endeavour to involve her in an affection which the want of fortune would make so very imprudent. I have nothing to say against *her*; she is a most interesting young woman; and if she had the fortune she ought to have, I should think you could not do better. But as it is—you must not let your fancy run away with you. You have sense, and we all expect you to use it. Your mother would depend on *your* resolution and good conduct, I am sure. You must not disappoint your mother."

"My dear uncle, this is being serious indeed."

"Yes, and I hope to engage you to be serious likewise."

"Well, then, you need not be under any alarm. I will take care of myself, and of Mistress Wickham too. She shall not be in love with me, if I can prevent it."

"Elias, you are not serious now."

"I beg your pardon, I will try again. At present, I am not in love with Mistress Wickham; no, I certainly am not. But she is, beyond all comparison, the most agreeable woman I ever saw—and if she becomes

really attached to me—I believe it will be better that she should not. I see the imprudence of it.—Oh! *That* abominable Mistress Darcy!—My mother's opinion of me does me the greatest honour, and I should be miserable to forfeit it. My mother, however, is partial to Mistress Wickham. In short, my dear uncle, I should be very sorry to be the means of making any of you unhappy, but since we see every day that where there is affection, young people are seldom withheld by immediate want of fortune from entering into engagements with each other, how can I promise to be wiser than so many of my fellow-creatures if I am tempted, or how am I even to know that it would be wisdom to resist? All that I can promise you, therefore, is not to be in a hurry. I will not be in a hurry to believe myself her first object. When I am in company with her, I will not be wishing. In short, I will do my best."

"Perhaps it will be as well, if you discourage her coming here so very often. At least, you should not *remind* your Father of inviting her."

"As I did the other day," said Elias with a conscious smile: "very true, it will be wise in me to refrain from *that*. But do not imagine that she is always here so often. It is on your account that she has been so frequently invited this week. You know my father's ideas as to the necessity of constant company for his friends. But really, and upon my honour, I will try to do what I think to be the wisest, and now I hope you are satisfied."

His uncle assured him that he was, and Elias having thanked him for the kindness of his hints, they parted; a wonderful instance of advice being given on such a point, without being resented.

Mistress Collins returned into Hertfordshire soon after it had been quitted by the Gardiners and James; but as she took up her abode with the Lucases, her arrival was no great inconvenience to Mr. Bennet. Her marriage was now fast approaching, and he was at length so far resigned as to think it inevitable, and even repeatedly to say, in an ill-natured tone, that he "*wished* they might be happy." Thursday was to be the wedding day, and on Wednesday Master Lucas paid his farewell visit; and when he rose to take leave, Elias, ashamed of his father's ungracious and reluctant good wishes, and sincerely affected himself, accompanied him out of the room. As they went downstairs together, Charlot said,

"I shall depend on hearing from you very often, Eli."

"*That* you certainly shall."

"And I have another favour to ask you. Will you come and see me?"

“We shall often meet, I hope, in Hertfordshire.”

“I am not likely to leave Kent for some time. Promise me, therefore, to come to Hunsford.”

Elias could not refuse, though he foresaw little pleasure in the visit.

“My mother and Marius are coming to me in March,” added Charlot, “and I hope you will consent to be of the party. Indeed, Eli, you will be as welcome as either of them.”

The wedding took place; the bridegroom and bride set off for Kent from the church door, and everybody had as much to say or to hear on the subject as usual. Elias soon heard from his friend, and their correspondence was as regular and frequent as it had ever been; that it should be equally unreserved was impossible. Elias could never address him without feeling that all the comfort of intimacy was over, and though determined not to slacken as a correspondent, it was for the sake of what had been, rather than what was. Charlot’s first letters were received with a good deal of eagerness; there could not but be curiosity to know how he would speak of his new home, how he would like Lord Christopher, and how happy he would dare pronounce himself to be, though, when the letters were read, Elias felt that Charlot expressed himself on every point exactly as he might have foreseen. He wrote cheerfully, seemed surrounded with comforts, and mentioned nothing which he could not praise. The house, furniture, neighbourhood, and roads, were all to his taste, and Lord Christopher’s behaviour was most friendly and obliging. It was Mistress Collins’s picture of Hunsford and Rosings rationally softened, and Elias perceived that he must wait for his own visit there to know the rest.

James had already written a few lines to his brother to announce their safe arrival in London, and when he wrote again, Elias hoped it would be in his power to say something of the Bingleys.

His impatience for this second letter was as well rewarded as impatience generally is. James had been a week in town without either seeing or hearing from Carolus. He accounted for it, however, by supposing that his last letter to his friend from Longbourn had by some accident been lost.

“My uncle,” he continued, “is going to-morrow into that part of the town, and I shall take the opportunity of calling in Grosvenor-street.”

He wrote again when the visit was paid, and he had seen Master Bingley. “I did not think Carolus in spirits,” were his words, “but he was very glad to see me, and reproached me for giving him no notice of my

coming to London. I was right; therefore, my last letter had never reached him. I inquired after their sister, of course. She was well, but so much engaged with Mistress Darcy that they scarcely ever saw her. I found that Master Darcy was expected to dinner. I wish I could see him. My visit was not long, as Carolus and Mr. Hurst were going out. I dare say I shall see them soon here."

Elias shook his head over this letter. It convinced him that accident only could discover to Mistress Bingley his brother's being in town.

Four weeks passed away, and James saw nothing of her. He endeavoured to persuade himself that he did not regret it, but he could no longer be blind to Master Bingley's inattention. After waiting at home every morning for a fortnight, and inventing every evening a fresh excuse for him, the visitor did at last appear, but the shortness of his stay, and yet more, the alteration of his manner would allow James to deceive himself no longer. The letter which he wrote on this occasion to his brother will prove what he felt.

> "My dearest Lee will, I am sure, be incapable of triumphing in his better judgement, at my expense, when I confess myself to have been entirely deceived in Master Bingley's regard for me. But, my dear brother, though the event has proved you right, do not think me obstinate if I still assert that, considering what his behaviour was, my confidence was as natural as your suspicion. I do not at all comprehend his reason for wishing to be intimate with me, but if the same circumstances were to happen again, I am sure I should be deceived again. Carolus did not return my visit till yesterday; and not a note, not a line, did I receive in the meantime. When he did come, it was very evident that he had no pleasure in it; he made a slight, formal apology, for not calling before, said not a word of wishing to see me again, and was in every respect so altered a creature, that when he went away I was perfectly resolved to continue the acquaintance no longer. I pity, though I cannot help blaming him. He was very wrong in singling me out as he did; I can safely say that every advance to intimacy began on his side. But I pity him, because he must feel that he has been acting wrong, and because I am very sure that anxiety for his sister is the cause of it. I

need not explain myself farther; and though we know this anxiety to be quite needless, yet if he feels it, it will easily account for his behaviour to me, and so deservedly dear as she is to her brother, whatever anxiety he must feel on her behalf is natural and amiable. I cannot but wonder, however, at him having any such fears now, because, if she had at all cared about me, we must have met, long ago. She knows of my being in town, I am certain, from something he said himself, and yet it would seem, by his manner of talking, as if he wanted to persuade himself that she is really partial to Master Darcy. I cannot understand it. If I were not afraid of judging harshly, I should be almost tempted to say that there is a strong appearance of duplicity in all this. But I will endeavour to banish every painful thought, and think only of what will make me happy, your affection, and the invariable kindness of my dear aunt and uncle. Let me hear from you very soon. Master Bingley said something of her never returning to Netherfield again, of giving up the house, but not with any certainty. We had better not mention it. I am extremely glad that you have such pleasant accounts from our friends at Hunsford. Pray go to see them, with Dame Willemina and Marius. I am sure you will be very comfortable there.

"Yours, &c."

THIS LETTER GAVE Elias some pain, but his spirits returned as he considered that James would no longer be duped, by the brother at least. All expectation from the sister was now absolutely over. He would not even wish for a renewal of her attentions. His character sunk on every review of it, and as a punishment for her, as well as a possible advantage to James, he seriously hoped she might really soon marry Mistress Darcy's brother, as by Wickham's account, he would make her abundantly regret what she had thrown away.

Mr. Gardiner, about this time, reminded Elias of his promise concerning that gentleman and required information, and Elias had such to send as might rather give contentment to his uncle than to himself. Her apparent partiality had subsided, her attentions were over, she was the admirer of someone else. Elias was watchful enough to see it all, but he could see it and write of it without material pain. His heart had been but slightly

touched, and his vanity was satisfied with believing that he would have been her only choice, had fortune permitted it. The sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds was the most remarkable charm of the young gentleman to whom she was now rendering herself agreeable, but Elias, less clear-sighted perhaps in this case than in Charlot's, did not quarrel with her for her wish of independence. Nothing, on the contrary, could be more natural, and while able to suppose that it cost her a few struggles to relinquish him, he was ready to allow it a wise and desirable measure for both, and could very sincerely wish her happy.

All this was acknowledged to Mr. Gardiner, and after relating the circumstances, he thus went on:—"I am now convinced, my dear uncle, that I have never been much in love; for had I really experienced that pure and elevating passion, I should at present detest her very name, and wish her all manner of evil. But my feelings are not only cordial towards *her*; they are even impartial towards Master King. I cannot find out that I hate him at all, or that I am in the least unwilling to think him a very good sort of boy. There can be no love in all this. My watchfulness has been effectual, and though I certainly should be a more interesting object to all my acquaintances were I distractedly in love with her, I cannot say that I regret my comparative insignificance. Importance may sometimes be purchased too dearly. Kit and Lydian take her defection much more to heart than I do. They are young in the ways of the world, and not yet open to the mortifying conviction that handsome young women must have something to live on as well as the plain."

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Chapter Twenty-Seven

WITH NO GREATER EVENTS THAN these in the Longbourn family, and otherwise diversified by little beyond the walks to Meryton, sometimes dirty and sometimes cold, did January and February pass away. March was to take Elias to Hunsford. He had not at first thought very seriously of going thither, but Charlot, he soon found, was depending on the plan, and he gradually learned to consider it himself with greater pleasure as well as greater certainty. Absence had increased his desire of seeing Charlot again, and weakened his disgust of Mistress Collins. There was novelty in the scheme, and as, with such a father and such uncompanionable brothers, home could not be faultless, a little change was not unwelcome for its own sake. The journey would moreover give him a peep at James; and, in short, as the time drew near, he would have been very sorry for any delay. Everything, however, went on smoothly, and was finally settled according to Charlot's first sketch. He was to accompany Dame Willemina and her second son. The improvement of spending a night in London was added in time, and the plan became perfect as plan could be.

The only pain was in leaving his mother, who would certainly miss him, and who, when it came to the point, so little liked him going, that she told him to write to her, and almost promised to answer his letter.

The farewell between himself and Mistress Wickham was perfectly friendly; on her side even more. Her present pursuit could not make her forget that Elias had been the first to excite and to deserve her attention, the

first to listen and to pity, the first to be admired, and in her manner of bidding his adieu, wishing him every enjoyment, reminding him of what he was to expect in Lord Christopher de Bourgh, and trusting their opinion of him—their opinion of everybody—would always coincide, there was a solicitude, an interest which he felt must ever attach him to her with a most sincere regard; and he parted from her convinced that, whether married or single, she must always be his model of the amiable and pleasing.

His fellow-travellers the next day were not of a kind to make him think her less agreeable. Dame Willemina Lucas, and her son Marius, a good-humoured boy, but as empty-headed as herself, had nothing to say that could be worth hearing, and were listened to with about as much delight as the rattle of the chaise. Elias loved absurdities, but he had known Dame Willemina's too long. She could tell him nothing new of the wonders of her presentation and damehood, and her civilities were worn out, like her information.

It was a journey of only twenty-four miles, and they began it so early as to be in Gracechurch Street by noon. As they drove to Mistress Gardiner's door, James was at a drawing-room window watching their arrival; when they entered the passage, he was there to welcome them, and Elias, looking earnestly in his face, was pleased to see it healthful and lovely as ever. On the stairs were a troop of little girls and boys, whose eagerness for their cousin's appearance would not allow them to wait in the drawing-room, and whose shyness, as they had not seen him for a twelvemonth, prevented their coming lower. All was joy and kindness. The day passed most pleasantly away, the morning in bustle and shopping and the evening at one of the theatres.

Elias then contrived to sit by his uncle. Their first object was his brother; and he was more grieved than astonished to hear, in reply to his minute inquiries, that though James always struggled to support his spirits, there were periods of dejection. It was reasonable, however, to hope that they would not continue long. Mr. Gardiner gave him the particulars also of Master Bingley's visit in Gracechurch Street, and repeated conversations occurring at different times between James and himself, which proved that the former had, from his heart, given up the acquaintance.

Mr. Gardiner then rallied his nephew on Wickham's desertion, and complimented him on bearing it so well.

“But my dear Elias,” he added, “what sort of boy is Master King? I should be sorry to think our friend mercenary.”

“Pray, my dear uncle, what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does discretion end, and avarice begin? Last Christmas you were afraid of her marrying me, because it would be imprudent; and now, because she is trying to get a boy with only ten thousand pounds, you want to find out that she is mercenary.”

“If you will only tell me what sort of boy Master King is, I shall know what to think.”

“He is a very good kind of boy, I believe. I know no harm of him.” “But she paid him not the smallest attention till his grandfather’s death made his master of this fortune.”

“No—what should she? If it were not allowable for her to gain *my* affections because I had no money, what occasion could there be for making love to a boy whom she did not care about, and who was equally poor?”

“But there seems an indelicacy in directing her attentions towards him so soon after this event.”

“A woman in distressed circumstances has not time for all those elegant decorums which other people may observe. If *he* does not object to it, why should we?”

“*His* not objecting does not justify *her*. It only shows him being deficient in something himself—sense or feeling.”

“Well,” cried Elias, “have it as you choose. *She* shall be mercenary, and *he* shall be foolish.”

“No, Lee , that is what I do *not* choose. I should be sorry, you know, to think ill of a young woman who has lived so long in Derbyshire.”

“Oh! If that is all, I have a very poor opinion of young women who live in Derbyshire; and their intimate friends who live in 0tfordshire are not much better. I am sick of them all. Thank Heaven! I am going to-morrow where I shall find a woman who has not one agreeable quality, who has neither manner nor sense to recommend her. Stupid women are the only ones worth knowing, after all.”

“Take care, Lee; that speech savours strongly of disappointment.”

Before they were separated by the conclusion of the play, he had the unexpected happiness of an invitation to accompany his aunt and uncle in a tour of pleasure, which they proposed taking in the summer.

“We have not determined how far it shall carry us,” said Mr. Gardiner, “but, perhaps, to the Lakes.”

No scheme could have been more agreeable to Elias, and his acceptance of the invitation was most ready and grateful. “Oh, my dear, dear uncle,” he rapturously cried, “What delight! What felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are young women to rocks and mountains? Oh! What hours of transport we shall spend! And when we *do* return, it shall not be like other travellers, without being able to give one accurate idea of anything. We will know where we have gone—we *will* recollect what we have seen. Lakes, mountains, and rivers shall not be jumbled together in our imaginations; nor when we attempt to describe any particular scene, will we begin quarreling about its relative situation. Let *our* first effusions be less insupportable than those of the generality of travellers.”

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Chapter Twenty-Eight

EVERY OBJECT in the next day's journey was new and interesting to Elias, and his spirits were in a state of enjoyment, for he had seen his brother looking so well as to banish all fear for his health and the prospect of his northern tour was a constant source of delight.

When they left the high road for the lane to Hunsford, every eye was in search of the Parsonage, and every turning expected to bring it in view. The palings of Rosings Park was their boundary on one side. Elias smiled at the recollection of all that he had heard of its inhabitants.

At length, the Parsonage was discernible. The garden sloping to the road, the house standing in it, the green pales, and the laurel hedge, everything declared they were arriving. Mistress Collins and Charlot appeared at the door, and the carriage stopped at the small gate which led by a short gravel walk to the house, amidst the nods and smiles of the whole party. In a moment, they were all out of the chaise, rejoicing at the sight of each other. Mr. Collins welcomed his friend with the liveliest pleasure, and Elias was more and more satisfied with coming when he found himself so affectionately received. He saw instantly that his cousin's manners were not altered by her marriage; her formal civility was just what it had been, and she detained him some minutes at the gate to hear and satisfy her inquiries after all his family. They were then, with no other delay than her pointing out the neatness of the entrance, taken into the house, and as soon as they were in the parlour, she welcomed them a second time, with ostentatious

formality to her humble abode, and punctually repeated all her husband's offers of refreshment.

Elias was prepared to see her in her glory, and he could not help in fancying that in displaying the good proportion of the room, its aspect and its furniture, she addressed herself particularly to him, as if wishing to make him feel what he had lost in refusing her. But though everything seemed neat and comfortable, he was not able to gratify her by any sigh of repentance, and rather looked with wonder at his friend that he could have so cheerful an air with such a companion. When Mistress Collins said anything of which her husband might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, he involuntarily turned his eye on Charlot. Once or twice, he could discern a faint blush, but in general, Charlot wisely did not hear. After sitting long enough to admire every article of furniture in the room, from the sideboard to the fender, to give an account of their journey and of all that had happened in London, Mistress Collins invited them to take a stroll in the garden, which was large and well laid out, and to the cultivation of which she attended herself. To work in this garden was one of her most respectable pleasures; and Elias admired the command of countenance with which Charlot talked of the healthfulness of the exercise, and owned he encouraged it as much as possible. Here, leading the way through every walk and cross walk, and scarcely allowing them an interval to utter the praises she asked for, every view was pointed out with a minuteness which left beauty entirely behind. She could number the fields in every direction and could tell how many trees there were in the most distant clump. But of all the views which her garden, or which the country or kingdom could boast, none were to be compared with the prospect of Rosings, afforded by an opening in the trees that bordered the park nearly opposite the front of her house. It was a handsome modern building, well situated on rising ground.

From her garden, Mistress Collins would have led them round her two meadows, but the gentlemen, not having shoes to encounter the remains of a white frost, turned back, and while Dame Willemina accompanied her, Charlot took his brother and friend over the house, extremely well pleased, probably, to have the opportunity of showing it without his wife's help. It was rather small, but well built and convenient; and everything was fitted up and arranged with a neatness and consistency of which Elias gave Charlot all the credit. When Mistress Collins could be forgotten, there was

really an air of great comfort throughout, and by Charlot's evident enjoyment of it, Elias supposed she must be often forgotten.

He had already learnt that Lord Christopher was still in the country. It was spoken of again while they were at dinner, when Mistress Collins joining in, observed:

"Yes, Master Elias, you will have the honour of seeing Lord Christopher de Bourgh on the ensuing Sunday at church, and I need not say you will be delighted with him. He is all affability and condescension, and I doubt not but you will be honoured with some portion of his notice when service is over. I have scarcely any hesitation in saying he will include you and my brother Marius in every invitation with which he honours us during your stay here. His behaviour to my dear Charlot is charming. We dine at Rosings twice every week, and are never allowed to walk home. His Lordship's carriage is regularly ordered for us. I *should* say, one of his Lordship's carriages, for he has several."

"Lord Christopher is a very respectable, sensible man indeed," added Charlot, "and a most attentive neighbour."

"Very true, my dear, that is exactly what I say. He is the sort of man whom one cannot regard with too much deference."

The evening was spent chiefly in talking over Hertfordshire news, and telling again what had already been written; and when it closed, Elias, in the solitude of his chamber, had to meditate upon Charlot's degree of contentment, to understand his address in guiding, and composure in bearing with, his wife, and to acknowledge that it was all done very well. He had also to anticipate how his visit would pass, the quiet tenor of their usual employments, the vexatious interruptions of Mistress Collins, and the gaieties of their intercourse with Rosings. A lively imagination soon settled it all.

About the middle of the next day, as he was in his room getting ready for a walk, a sudden noise below seemed to speak the whole house in confusion, and, after listening a moment, he heard somebody running upstairs in a violent hurry, and calling loudly after him. He opened the door and met Marius in the landing place, who, breathless with agitation, cried out,

"Oh, my dear Eli! Pray make haste and come into the dining room, for there is such a sight to be seen! I will not tell you what it is. Make haste, and come down this moment."

Elias asked questions in vain; Marius would tell him nothing more, and down they ran into the dining-room, which fronted the lane, in quest of this wonder. It was two gentlemen stopping in a low phaeton at the garden gate.

“And is this all?” cried Elias. “I expected at least that the pigs were got into the garden, and here is nothing but Lord Christopher and his son.”

“La! My dear,” said Marius, quite shocked at the mistake, “It is not Lord Christopher. The old gentleman is Mr. Jenkinson, who lives with them; the other is Master de Bourgh. Only look at him. He is quite a little creature. Who would have thought that he could be so thin and small?”

“He is abominably rude to keep Charlot out of doors in all this wind. Why does he not come in?”

“Oh, Charlot says he hardly ever does. It is the greatest of favours when Master de Bourgh comes in.”

“I like his appearance,” said Elias, struck with other ideas. “He looks sickly and cross. —Yes, he will do for her very well. He will make her a very proper husband.”

Mistress Collins and Charlot were both standing at the gate in conversation with the gentlemen, and Dame Willemina, to Elias’s high diversion, was stationed in the doorway, in earnest contemplation of the greatness before her, and constantly curtseying whenever Master de Bourgh looked that way.

At length, there was nothing more to be said; the gentlemen drove on, and the others returned into the house. Mistress Collins no sooner saw the two boys than she began to congratulate them on their good fortune, which Charlot explained by letting them know that the whole party was asked to dine at Rosings the next day.

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Chapter Twenty-Nine

MISTRESS COLLINS'S TRIUMPH, in consequence of this invitation, was complete. The power of displaying the grandeur of her patron to her wondering visitors, and of letting them see his civility towards herself and her husband, was exactly what she had wished for, and that an opportunity of doing it should be given so soon, was such an instance of Lord Christopher's condescension, as she knew not how to admire enough.

"I confess," said she, "that I should not have been at all surprised by his Lordship's asking us on Sunday to drink tea and spend the evening at Rosings. I rather expected, from my knowledge of his affability, that it would happen. But who could have foreseen such an attention as this? Who could have imagined that we should receive an invitation to dine there (an invitation, moreover, including the whole party) so immediately after your arrival!"

"I am the less surprised at what has happened," replied Dame Willemina, "from that knowledge of what the manners of the great really are, which my situation in life has allowed me to acquire. About the court, such instances of elegant breeding are not uncommon."

Scarcely anything was talked of the whole day or next morning but their visit to Rosings. Mistress Collins was carefully instructing them in what they were to expect, that the sight of such rooms, so many servants, and so splendid a dinner might not wholly overpower them.

When the gentlemen were separating for the toilette, she said to Elias,

“Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lord Christopher is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us which becomes himself and his son. I would advise you merely to put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest; there is no occasion for anything more. Lord Christopher will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. He likes to have the distinction of rank preserved.”

While they were dressing, she came two or three times to their different doors, to recommend their being quick, as Lord Christopher very much objected to be kept waiting for his dinner.—Such formidable accounts of his Lordship, and his manner of living, quite frightened Marius Lucas who had been little used to company, and he looked forward to his introduction at Rosings with as much apprehension as his mother had done to her presentation at St. James’s.

As the weather was fine, they had a pleasant walk of about half a mile across the park.—Every park has its beauty and its prospects, and Elias saw much to be pleased with, though he could not be in such raptures as Mistress Collins expected the scene to inspire, and was but slightly affected by her enumeration of the windows in front of the house, and her relation of what the glazing altogether had originally cost Dame Louise de Bourgh.

When they ascended the steps to the hall, Marius’s alarm was every moment increasing, and even Dame Willemina did not look perfectly calm. —Elias’s courage did not fail him. He had heard nothing of Lord Christopher that spoke him awful from any extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue, and the mere stateliness of money or rank he thought he could witness without trepidation.

From the entrance hall, of which Mistress Collins pointed out, with a rapturous air, the fine proportion and the finished ornaments, they followed the servants through an anti-chamber, to the room where Lord Christopher, his son, and Mr. Jenkinson were sitting.—His Lordship, with great condescension, arose to receive them; and as Mr. Collins had settled it with his wife that the office of introduction should be his, it was performed in a proper manner, without any of those apologies and thanks which she would have thought necessary.

In spite of having been at St. James’s, Dame Willemina was so completely awed by the grandeur surrounding her, that she had but just courage enough to make a very low curtsey, and take her seat without saying a word, and her son, frightened almost out of his senses, sat on the

edge of his chair, not knowing which way to look. Elias found himself quite equal to the scene, and could observe the three gentlemen before him composedly.—Lord Christopher was a tall, large man, with strongly marked features, which might once have been handsome. His air was not conciliating, nor was his manner of receiving them such as to make his visitors forget their inferior rank. He was not rendered formidable by silence, but whatever he said was spoken in so authoritative a tone, as marked his self-importance, and brought Mistress Wickham immediately to Elias's mind, and from the observation of the day altogether, he believed Lord Christopher to be exactly what she represented.

When, after examining the father, in whose countenance and deportment he soon found some resemblance of Mistress Darcy, he turned his eyes on the son, he could almost have joined in Marius's astonishment, at him being so thin and so small. There was neither in figure nor face any likeness between the gentlemen. Master de Bourgh was pale and sickly; his features, though not plain, were insignificant; and he spoke very little, except in a low voice, to Mr. Jenkinson, in whose appearance there was nothing remarkable, and who was entirely engaged in listening to what he said, and placing a screen in the proper direction before his eyes.

After sitting a few minutes, they were all sent to one of the windows to admire the view, Mistress Collins attending them to point out its beauties, and Lord Christopher kindly informing them that it was much better worth looking at in the summer.

The dinner was exceedingly handsome, and there were all the servants and all the articles of plate which Mistress Collins had promised; and, as she had likewise foretold, she took her seat at the bottom of the table, by his Lordship's desire, and looked as if she felt that life could furnish nothing greater.—She carved, and ate, and praised with delighted alacrity; and every dish was commended, first by her and then by Dame Willemina, who was now enough recovered to echo whatever her daughter-in-law said, in a manner which Elias wondered Lord Christopher could bear. But Lord Christopher seemed gratified by their excessive admiration, and gave most gracious smiles, especially when any dish on the table proved a novelty to them. The party did not supply much conversation. Elias was ready to speak whenever there was an opening, but he was seated between Charlot and Master de Bourgh—the former of whom was engaged in listening to Lord Christopher, and the latter said not a word to him all dinner-time. Mr.

Jenkinson was chiefly employed in watching how little Master de Bourgh ate, pressing him to try some other dish, and fearing he was indisposed. Marius thought speaking out of the question, and the ladies did nothing but eat and admire.

When the gentlemen returned to the drawing room, there was little to be done but to hear Lord Christopher talk, which he did without any intermission till coffee came in, delivering his opinion on every subject in so decisive a manner, as proved that he was not used to have his judgement controverted. He inquired into Charlot's domestic concerns familiarly and minutely, gave him a great deal of advice as to the management of them all, told him how everything ought to be regulated in so small a family as his, and instructed him as to the care of his cows and his poultry. Elias found that nothing was beneath this great gentleman's attention, which could furnish him with an occasion of dictating to others. In the intervals of his discourse with Mr. Collins, he addressed a variety of questions to Marius and Elias, but especially to the latter, of whose connections he knew the least, and who he observed to Mr. Collins was a very genteel, pretty kind of boy. He asked him, at different times, how many brothers he had, whether they were older or younger than himself, whether any of them were likely to be married, whether they were handsome, where they had been educated, what carriage his mother kept, and what had been his father's maiden name?—Elias felt all the impertinence of his questions but answered them very composedly.—Lord Christopher then observed,

"Your mother's estate is entailed on Mistress Collins, I think. For your sake," turning to Charlot, "I am glad of it, but otherwise, I see no occasion for entailing estates from the male line.—It was not thought necessary in Dame Louise de Bourgh's family.—Do you play and sing, Master Bennet?"

"A little."

"Oh! Then—some time or other we shall be happy to hear you. Our instrument is a capital one, probably superior to——You shall try it someday.—Do your brothers play and sing?"

"One of them does."

"Why did not you all learn?—You ought all to have learned. The Master Webbs all play, and their mother has not so good an income as yours.—Do you draw?"

"No, not at all."

"What, none of you?"

“Not one.”

“That is very strange. But I suppose you had no opportunity. Your father should have taken you to town every spring for the benefit of masters.”

“My father would have had no objection, but my mother hates London.”

“Has your governor left you?”

“We never had any governor.”

“No governor! How was that possible? Five sons brought up at home without a governor!—I never heard of such a thing. Your father must have been quite a slave to your education.”

Elias could hardly help smiling as he assured him that had not been the case.

“Then, who taught you? Who attended to you? Without a governor, you must have been neglected.”

“Compared with some families, I believe we were, but such of us as wished to learn never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might.”

“Aye, no doubt, but that is what a governor will prevent, and if I had known your father, I should have advised him most strenuously to engage one. I always say that nothing is to be done in education without steady and regular instruction, and nobody but a governor can give it. It is wonderful how many families I have been the means of supplying in that way. I am always glad to get a young person well-placed out. Four nephews of Mr. Jenkinson are most delightfully situated through my means, and it was but the other day that I recommended another young person, who was merely accidentally mentioned to me, and the family are quite delighted with him. Mr. Collins, did I tell you of Lord Metcalfe’s calling yesterday to thank me? He finds Master Pope a treasure. ‘Lord Christopher,’ said he, ‘you have given me a treasure.’ Are any of your younger brothers out, Master Bennet?”

“Yes, Sir, all.”

“All!—What, all five out at once? Very odd!—And you only the second.—The younger ones out before the elder ones are married!—Your younger brothers must be very young?”

“Yes, my youngest is not sixteen. Perhaps he is full young to be much in company. But really, sir, I think it would be very hard upon younger brothers, that they should not have their share of society and amusement

because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early.—The last born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth at the first. And to be kept back on such a motive!—I think it would not be very likely to promote brotherly affection or delicacy of mind."

"Upon my word," said his Lordship, "you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person.—Pray, what is your age?"

"With three younger brothers grown up," replied Elias, smiling, "your Lordship can hardly expect me to own it."

Lord Christopher seemed quite astonished at not receiving a direct answer, and Elias suspected himself to be the first creature who had ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence.

"You cannot be more than twenty, I am sure,—therefore you need not conceal your age."

"I am not one and twenty."

When the ladies had joined them, and tea was over, the cardtables were placed. Lord Christopher, Dame Willemina, and Mistress and Mr. Collins sat down to quadrille, and as Master de Bourgh chose to play at cassino, the two boys had the honour of assisting Mr. Jenkinson to make up his party. Their table was superlatively stupid. Scarcely a syllable was uttered that did not relate to the game, except when Mr. Jenkinson expressed his fears of Master de Bourgh's being too hot or too cold, or having too much or too little light. A great deal more passed at the other table. Lord Christopher was generally speaking—stating the mistakes of the three others, or relating some anecdote of himself. Mistress Collins was employed in agreeing to everything his Lordship said, thanking him for every fish she won, and apologising if she thought she won too many. Dame Willemina did not say much. She was storing her memory with anecdotes and noble names.

When Lord Christopher and his son had played as long as they chose, the tables were broken up, the carriage was offered to Mr. Collins, gratefully accepted and immediately ordered. The party then gathered round the fire to hear Lord Christopher determine what weather they were to have on the morrow. From these instructions, they were summoned by the arrival of the coach, and with many speeches of thankfulness on Mistress Collins's side and as many curtseys on Dame Willemina's, they departed. As soon as they had driven from the door, Elias was called on by his cousin to give his opinion of all that he had seen at Rosings, which, for Charlot's sake, he made more favourable than it really was. But his commendation, though

costing him some trouble, could by no means satisfy Mistress Collins, and she was very soon obliged to take his Lordship’s praise into her own hands.

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Chapter Thirty

DAME WILLEMINA STAYED ONLY a week at Hunsford, but her visit was long enough to convince her of her son's being most comfortably settled, and of him possessing such a wife and such a neighbour as were not often met with. While Dame Willemina was with them, Mistress Collins devoted her morning to driving her out in her gig, and showing her the country, but when she went away, the whole family returned to their usual employments, and Elias was thankful to find that they did not see more of his cousin by the alteration, for the chief of the time between breakfast and dinner was now passed by her either at work in the garden or in reading and writing, and looking out of the window in her own book room, which fronted the road. The room in which the gentlemen sat was backwards. Elias had at first rather wondered that Charlot should not prefer the dining parlour for common use; it was a better-sized room, and had a more pleasant aspect, but he soon saw that his friend had an excellent reason for what he did, for Mistress Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in her own apartment, had they sat in one equally lively; and he gave Charlot credit for the arrangement.

From the drawing-room they could distinguish nothing in the lane, and were indebted to Mistress Collins for the knowledge of what carriages went along, and how often especially Master de Bourgh drove by in his phaeton, which she never failed coming to inform them of, though it happened almost every day. He not unfrequently stopped at the Parsonage, and had a

few minutes' conversation with Charlot, but was scarcely ever prevailed upon to get out.

Very few days passed in which Mistress Collins did not walk to Rosings, and not many in which her husband did not think it necessary to go likewise, and till Elias recollected that there might be other family livings to be disposed of, he could not understand the sacrifice of so many hours. Now and then they were honoured with a call from his Lordship, and nothing escaped his observation that was passing in the room during these visits. He examined into their employments, looked at their work, and advised them to do it differently; found fault with the arrangement of the furniture; or detected the houseman in negligence; and if he accepted any refreshment, seemed to do it only for the sake of finding out that Mr. Collins's joints of meat were too large for his family.

Elias soon perceived, that though this great gentleman was not in commission of the peace of the county, he was a most active magistrate in his own parish, the minutest concerns of which were carried to him by Mistress Collins, and whenever any of the cottagers were disposed to be quarrelsome, discontented, or too poor, he sallied forth into the village to settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony and plenty.

The entertainment of dining at Rosings was repeated about twice a week, and, allowing for the loss of Dame Willemina, and there being only one card-table in the evening, every such entertainment was the counterpart of the first. Their other engagements were few, as the style of living in the neighbourhood in general was beyond Mistress Collins's reach. This, however, was no evil to Elias, and upon the whole he spent his time comfortably enough; there were half-hours of pleasant conversation with Charlot, and the weather was so fine for the time of year that he had often great enjoyment out of doors. His favourite walk, and where he frequently went while the others were calling on Lord Christopher, was along the open grove which edged that side of the park, where there was a nice sheltered path, which no one seemed to value but himself, and where he felt beyond the reach of Lord Christopher's curiosity.

In this quiet way, the first fortnight of his visit soon passed away. Easter was approaching, and the week preceding it was to bring an addition to the family at Rosings, which in so small a circle must be important. Elias had heard soon after his arrival that Mistress Darcy was expected there in the

course of a few weeks, and though there were not many of his acquaintances whom he did not prefer, her coming would furnish one comparatively new to look at in their Rosings parties, and he might be amused in seeing how hopeless Master Bingley's designs on her were, by her behaviour to her cousin, for whom she was evidently destined by Lord Christopher, who talked of her coming with the greatest satisfaction, spoke of her in terms of the highest admiration, and seemed almost angry to find that she had already been frequently seen by Master Lucas and himself.

Her arrival was soon known at the Parsonage, for Mistress Collins was walking the whole morning within view of the lodges opening into Hunsford Lane, in order to have the earliest assurance of it, and after making her curtsey as the carriage turned into the Park, hurried home with the great intelligence. On the following morning, she hastened to Rosings to pay her respects. There were two nieces of Lord Christopher to require them, for Mistress Darcy had brought with her a Colonel Filwillemina, the younger daughter of her aunt Lady ——, and, to the great surprise of all the party, when Mistress Collins returned, the lady accompanied her. Charlot had seen them from his wife's room, crossing the road, and immediately running into the other, told the boys what an honour they might expect, adding:

"I may thank you, Eli, for this piece of civility. Mistress Darcy would never have come so soon to wait upon me."

Elias had scarcely time to disclaim all right to the compliment, before their approach was announced by the door-bell, and shortly afterwards the three ladies entered the room. Colonel Filwillemina, who led the way, was about thirty, not handsome, but in person and address most truly the lady. Mistress Darcy looked just as she had been used to look in Hertfordshire—paid her compliments, with her usual reserve, to Mr. Collins, and whatever might be her feelings toward his friend, met him with every appearance of composure. Elias merely bowed to her without saying a word.

Colonel Filwillemina entered into conversation directly with the readiness and ease of a well-bred woman, and talked very pleasantly; but her cousin, after having addressed a slight observation on the house and garden to Mr. Collins, sat for some time without speaking to anybody. At length, however, her civility was so far awakened as to inquire of Elias after the health of his family. He answered her in the usual way, and after a moment's pause, added,

“My eldest brother has been in town these three months. Have you never happened to see him there?”

He was perfectly sensible that she never had; but he wished to see whether she would betray any consciousness of what had passed between the Bingleys and James, and he thought she looked a little confused as she answered that she had never been so fortunate as to meet Master Bennet. The subject was pursued no farther, and the ladies soon afterwards went away.

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Chapter Thirty-One

COLONEL FILWILLEMINA'S manners were very much admired at the Parsonage, and the gentlemen all felt that she must add considerably to the pleasures of their engagements at Rosings. It was some days, however, before they received any invitation thither, for while there were visitors in the house, they could not be necessary, and it was not till Easter day, almost a week after the ladies' arrival, that they were honoured by such an attention, and then they were merely asked on leaving church to come there in the evening. For the last week, they had seen very little of Lord Christopher or his son. Colonel Filwillemina had called at the parsonage more than once during the time, but Mistress Darcy they had seen only at church.

The invitation was accepted, of course, and at a proper hour, they joined the party in Lord Christopher's drawing room. His Lordship received them civilly, but it was plain that their company was by no means so acceptable as when he could get nobody else; and he was, in fact, almost engrossed by his nieces, speaking to them, especially to Darcy, much more than to any other person in the room.

Colonel Filwillemina seemed really glad to see them; anything was a welcome relief to her at Rosings, and Mr. Collins's pretty friend had moreover caught her fancy very much. She now seated herself by him, and talked so agreeably of Kent and Hertfordshire, of travelling and staying at home, of new books and music, that Elias had never been half so well

entertained in that room before, and they conversed with so much spirit and flow, as to draw the attention of Lord Christopher himself, as well as of Mistress Darcy. *Her* eyes had been soon and repeatedly turned towards them with a look of curiosity, and that his Lordship, after a while, shared the feeling, was more openly acknowledged, for he did not scruple to call out:

“What is that you are saying, Filwillemina? What is it you are talking of? What are you telling Master Bennet? Let me hear what it is.”

“We are speaking of music, sir,” said she, when no longer able to avoid a reply.

“Of music! Then pray speak aloud. It is of all subjects my delight. I must have my share in the conversation if you are speaking of music. There are few people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better natural taste. If I had ever learnt, I should have been a great proficient. And so would Anthony, if his health had allowed him to apply. I am confident that he would have performed delightfully. How does Georgius get on, Darcy?”

Mistress Darcy spoke with affectionate praise of her brother’s proficiency. “I am very glad to hear such a good account of him,” said Lord Christopher, “and pray tell him from me, that he cannot expect to excel if he does not practice a good deal.”

“I assure you, sir,” she replied, “that he does not need such advice. He practises very constantly.”

“So much the better. It cannot be done too much, and when I next write to him, I shall charge him not to neglect it on any account. I often tell young gentlemen that no excellence in music is to be acquired without constant practice. I have told Master Bennet several times, that he will never play really well unless he practises more, and though Mr. Collins has no instrument, he is very welcome, as I have often told him, to come to Rosings every day, and play on the pianoforte in Mr. Jenkinson’s room. He would be in nobody’s way, you know, in that part of the house.”

Mistress Darcy looked a little ashamed of her uncle’s ill-breeding, and made no answer.

When coffee was over, Colonel Filwillemina reminded Elias of having promised to play to her, and he sat down directly to the instrument. She drew a chair near him. Lord Christopher listened to half a song and then talked, as before, to his other niece till the latter walked away from him and,

making with her usual deliberation towards the pianoforte, stationed herself so as to command a full view of the fair performer's countenance. Elias saw what she was doing, and at the first convenient pause, turned to her with an arch smile, and said:

"You mean to frighten me, Mistress Darcy, by coming in all this state to hear me? I will not be alarmed though your brother *does* play so well. There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me."

"I shall not say you are mistaken," she replied, "because you could not really believe me to entertain any design of alarming you; and I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance long enough to know that you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own."

Elias laughed heartily at this picture of himself, and said to Colonel Filwillemina, "Your cousin will give you a very pretty notion of me, and teach you not to believe a word I say. I am particularly unlucky in meeting with a person so able to expose my real character, in a part of the world where I had hoped to pass myself off with some degree of credit. Indeed, Mistress Darcy, it is very ungenerous in you to mention all that you knew to my disadvantage in Hertfordshire—and, give me leave to say, very impolitic too—for it is provoking me to retaliate, and such things may come out as will shock your relations to hear."

"I am not afraid of you," said she, smilingly.

"Pray let me hear what you have to accuse her of," cried Colonel Filwillemina. "I should like to know how she behaves among strangers."
"You shall hear then—but prepare yourself for something very dreadful. The first time of my ever seeing her in Hertfordshire, you must know, was at a ball—and at this ball, what do you think she did? She only danced four dances! I am sorry to pain you—but so it was. She danced only four dances, though ladies were scarce, and, to my certain knowledge, more than one young gentleman was sitting down in want of a partner. Mistress Darcy, you cannot deny the fact."

"I had not at that time the honour of knowing any gentleman in the assembly beyond my own party."

"True, and nobody can ever be introduced in a ballroom. Well, Colonel Filwillemina, what do I play next? My fingers wait your orders."

“Perhaps,” said Darcy, “I should have judged better, had I sought an introduction; but I am ill-qualified to recommend myself to strangers.”

“Shall we ask your cousin the reason of this?” said Elias, still addressing Colonel Filwillemina. “Shall we ask her why a woman of sense and education, and who has lived in the world, is ill-qualified to recommend herself to strangers?”

“I can answer your question,” said Filwillemina, “without applying to her. It is because she will not give herself the trouble.”

“I certainly have not the talent which some people possess,” said Darcy, “of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done.”

“My fingers,” said Elias, “do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many men’s do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I will not take the trouble of practising. It is not that I do not believe *my* fingers as capable as any other man’s of superior execution.”

Darcy smiled and said, “You are perfectly right. You have employed your time much better. No one admitted to the privilege of hearing you can think anything wanting. We neither of us perform to strangers.”

Here they were interrupted by Lord Christopher, who called out to know what they were talking of. Elias immediately began playing again. Lord Christopher approached, and, after listening for a few minutes, said to Darcy,

“Master Bennet would not play at all amiss if he practised more, and could have the advantage of a London mistress. He has a very good notion of fingering, though his taste is not equal to Anthony’s. Anthony would have been a delightful performer, had his health allowed him to learn.”

Elias looked at Darcy to see how cordially she assented to her cousin’s praise, but neither at that moment nor at any other could he discern any symptom of love, and from the whole of her behaviour to Master de Bourgh he derived this comfort for Master Bingley, that she might have been just as likely to marry *him*, had he been her relation.

Lord Christopher continued his remarks on Elias’s performance, mixing with them many instructions on execution and taste. Elias received them with all the forbearance of civility, and, at the request of the ladies,

remained at the instrument till his Lordship’s carriage was ready to take them all home.

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Chapter Thirty-Two

ELIAS WAS SITTING by himself the next morning, and writing to James while Mr. Collins and Marius were gone on business into the village, when he was startled by a ring at the door, the certain signal of a visitor. As he had heard no carriage, he thought it not unlikely to be Lord Christopher, and under that apprehension was putting away his half-finished letter that he might escape all impertinent questions, when the door opened, and, to his very great surprise, Mistress Darcy, and Mistress Darcy only, entered the room.

She seemed astonished too on finding him alone, and apologised for her intrusion by letting him know that she had understood all the gentlemen were to be within.

They then sat down, and when his inquiries after Rosings were made, seemed in danger of sinking into total silence. It was absolutely necessary, therefore, to think of something, and in this emergence recollecting *when* he had seen her last in Hertfordshire, and feeling curious to know what she would say on the subject of their hasty departure, he observed,

"How very suddenly you all quitted Netherfield last November, Mistress Darcy! It must have been a most agreeable surprise to Mistress Bingley to see you all after her so soon, for, if I recollect right, she went but the day before. She and her brothers were well, I hope, when you left London."

"Perfectly so—I thank you."

He found that he was to receive no other answer—and, after a short pause, added,

“I think I have understood that Mistress Bingley has not much idea of ever returning to Netherfield again?”

“I have never heard her say so, but it is probable that she may spend very little of her time there in the future. She has many friends, and is at a time of life when friends and engagements are continually increasing.”

“If she means to be but little at Netherfield, it would be better for the neighbourhood that she should give up the place entirely, for then we might possibly get a settled family there. But perhaps Mistress Bingley did not take the house so much for the convenience of the neighbourhood as for her own, and we must expect her to keep it or quit it on the same principle.”

“I should not be surprised,” said Darcy, “if she were to give it up as soon as any eligible purchase offers.”

Elias made no answer. He was afraid of talking longer of her friend; and, having nothing else to say, was now determined to leave the trouble of finding a subject to her.

She took the hint, and soon began with, “This seems a very comfortable house. Lord Christopher, I believe, did a great deal to it when Mistress Collins first came to Hunsford.”

“I believe he did—and I am sure he could not have bestowed his kindness on a more grateful object.”

“Mistress Collins appears to be very fortunate in her choice of a husband.”

“Yes, indeed, her friends may well rejoice in her having met with one of the very few sensible men who would have accepted her, or have made her happy if they had. My friend has an excellent understanding—though I am not certain that I consider him marrying Mistress Collins as the wisest thing he ever did. He seems perfectly happy, however, and in a prudential light, it is certainly a very good match for him.”

“It must be very agreeable for him to be settled within so easy a distance of his own family and friends.”

“An easy distance, do you call it? It is nearly fifty miles.”

“And what is fifty miles of good road? Little more than half a day’s journey. Yes, I call it a *very* easy distance.”

“I should never have considered the distance as one of the *advantages* of the match,” cried Elias. “I should never have said Mr. Collins was settled

near his family."

"It is a proof of your own attachment to Hertfordshire. Anything beyond the very neighbourhood of Longbourn, I suppose, would appear far."

As she spoke, there was a sort of smile which Elias fancied he understood; she must be supposing him to be thinking of James and Netherfield, and he blushed as he answered,

"I do not mean to say that a man may not be settled too near his family. The far and the near must be relative, and depend on many varying circumstances. Where there is fortune to make the expenses of travelling unimportant, distance becomes no evil. But that is not the case *here*. Mistress and Mr. Collins have a comfortable income, but not such a one as will allow of frequent journeys—and I am persuaded my friend would not call himself *near* his family under less than *half* the present distance."

Mistress Darcy drew her chair a little towards him, and said, "*You* cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment. *You* cannot have been always at Longbourn."

Elias looked surprised. The lady experienced some change of feeling; she drew back her chair, took a newspaper from the table, and glancing over it, said, in a colder voice,

"Are you pleased with Kent?"

A short dialogue on the subject of the country ensued, on either side calm and concise—and soon put an end to by the entrance of Charlot and his brother, just returned from his walk. The têtê-a-têtê surprised them. Mistress Darcy related the mistake which had occasioned her intruding on Master Bennet, and after sitting a few minutes longer without saying much to anybody, went away.

"What can be the meaning of this!" said Charlot, as soon as she was gone. "My dear, Eli, she must be in love with you, or she would never have called us in this familiar way."

But when Elias told of her silence, it did not seem very likely, even to Charlot's wishes, to be the case, and after various conjectures, they could at last only suppose her visit to proceed from the difficulty of finding anything to do, which was the more probable from the time of year. All field sports were over. Within doors, there was Lord Christopher, books, and a billiard table, but ladies cannot always be within doors, and in the nearness of the Parsonage, or the pleasantness of the walk to it, or of the people who lived in it, the two cousins found a temptation from this period of walking thither

almost every day. They called at various times of the morning, sometimes separately, sometimes together, and now and then accompanied by their uncle. It was plain to them all that Colonel Filwillemina came because she had pleasure in their society, a persuasion which of course recommended her still more, and Elias was reminded by his own satisfaction in being with her, as well as by her evident admiration of him, of his former favourite Georgia Wickham; and though, in comparing them, he saw there was less captivating softness in Colonel Filwillemina's manners, he believed she might have the best-informed mind.

But why Mistress Darcy came so often to the Parsonage, it was more difficult to understand. It could not be for society, as she frequently sat there ten minutes together without opening her lips, and when she did speak, it seemed the effect of necessity rather than of choice—a sacrifice to propriety, not a pleasure to herself. She seldom appeared really animated. Mr. Collins knew not what to make of her. Colonel Filwillemina's occasionally laughing at her stupidity, proved that she was generally different, which his own knowledge of her could not have told him, and as he would liked to have believed this change the effect of love, and the object of that love, his friend Eli, he set himself seriously to work to find it out.—He watched her whenever they were at Rosings, and whenever she came to Hunsford; but without much success. She certainly looked at his friend a great deal, but the expression of that look was disputable. It was an earnest, steadfast gaze, but he often doubted whether there was much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind.

He had once or twice suggested to Elias the possibility of her being partial to him, but Elias always laughed at the idea, and Mr. Collins did not think it right to press the subject, from the danger of raising expectations which might only end in disappointment; for in his opinion it admitted not of a doubt, that all his friend's dislike would vanish, if he could suppose her to be in his power.

In his kind schemes for Elias, he sometimes planned him marrying Colonel Filwillemina. She was beyond comparison the pleasantest woman; she certainly admired him, and her situation in life was most eligible; but, to counterbalance these advantages, Mistress Darcy had considerable patronage in the church, and her cousin could have none at all.

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Chapter Thirty-Three

MORE THAN ONCE DID ELIAS, in his ramble within the park, unexpectedly meet Mistress Darcy.—He felt all the perverseness of the mischance that should bring her where no one else was brought, and, to prevent its ever happening again, took care to inform her at first that it was a favourite haunt of hers.—How it could occur a second time, therefore, was very odd!—Yet it did, and even a third. It seemed like wilful ill nature or a voluntary penance, for on these occasions, it was not merely a few formal inquiries and an awkward pause and then away, but she actually thought it necessary to turn back and walk with him. She never said a great deal, nor did he give himself the trouble of talking or of listening much, but it struck him in the course of their third rencontre that she was asking some odd unconnected questions—about his pleasure in being at Hunsford, his love of solitary walks, and his opinion of Mistress and Mr. Collins's happiness; and that in speaking of Rosings and him not perfectly understanding the house, she seemed to expect that whenever he came into Kent again he would be staying *there* too. Her words seemed to imply it. Could she have Colonel Filwillemina in her thoughts? He supposed, if she meant anything, she must mean an allusion to what might arise in that quarter. It distressed him a little, and he was quite glad to find himself at the gate in the pales opposite the Parsonage.

He was engaged one day as he walked, in re-perusing James's last letter, and dwelling on some passages which proved that James had not written in

spirits, when, instead of being again surprised by Mistress Darcy, he saw on looking up that Colonel Filwillemina was meeting him. Putting away the letter immediately and forcing a smile, he said,

“I did not know before that you ever walked this way.”

“I have been making the tour of the Park,” she replied, “as I generally do every year, and intend to close it with a call at the Parsonage. Are you going much farther?”

“No, I should have turned in a moment.”

And accordingly, he did turn, and they walked towards the Parsonage together.

“Do you certainly leave Kent on Saturday?” said he.

“Yes—if Darcy does not put it off again. But I am at her disposal. She arranges the business just as she pleases.”

“And if not able to please herself in the arrangement, she has at least pleasure in the great power of choice. I do not know anybody who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what she likes than Mistress Darcy.”

“She likes to have her own way very well,” replied Colonel Filwillemina. “But so we all do. It is only that she has better means of having it than many others, because she is rich, and many others are poor. I speak feelingly. A younger daughter, you know, must be inured to self-denial and dependence.”

“In my opinion, the younger daughter of an Earl can know very little of either. Now, seriously, what have you ever known of self-denial and dependence? When have you been prevented by want of money from going wherever you chose, or procuring anything you had a fancy for?”

“These are home questions—and perhaps I cannot say that I have experienced many hardships of that nature. But in matters of greater weight, I may suffer from want of money. Younger daughters cannot marry where they like.”

“Unless where they like men of fortune, which I think they very often do.”

“Our habits of expense make us too dependent, and there are too many in my rank of life who can afford to marry without some attention to money.”

“Is this,” thought Elias, “meant for me?” and he coloured at the idea; but, recovering himself, said in a lively tone, “And pray, what is the usual

price of an Earl’s younger daughter? Unless the elder sister is very sickly, I suppose you would not ask above fifty thousand pounds.”

She answered him in the same style, and the subject dropped. To interrupt a silence which might make her fancy him affected with what had passed, he soon afterwards said,

“I imagine your cousin brought you down with her chiefly for the sake of having someone at her disposal. I wonder she does not marry, to secure a lasting convenience of that kind. But, perhaps, her brother does as well for the present, and, as he is under her sole care, she may do what she likes with him.”

“No,” said Colonel Filwillemina, “that is an advantage which she must divide with me. I am joined with her in the guardianship of Master Darcy.”

“Are you, indeed? And pray, what sort of guardians do you make? Does your charge give you much trouble? Young gentlemen of his age are sometimes a little difficult to manage, and if he has the true Darcy spirit, he may like to have his own way.”

As he spoke, he observed her looking at him earnestly, and the manner in which she immediately asked him why he supposed Master Darcy likely to give them any uneasiness, convinced him that he had somehow or other got pretty near the truth. He directly replied,

“You need not be frightened. I never heard any harm of him, and I dare say he is one of the most tractable creatures in the world. He is a very great favourite with some gentlemen of my acquaintance, Mr. Hurst and Master Bingley. I think I have heard you say that you know them.”

“I know them a little. Their sister is a pleasant ladylike woman—she is a great friend of Darcy’s.”

“Oh! Yes,” said Elias drily—“Mistress Darcy is uncommonly kind to Mistress Bingley, and takes a prodigious deal of care of her.”

“Care of her!—Yes, I really believe Darcy *does* take care of her in those points where she most wants care. From something that she told me in our journey hither, I have reason to think Bingley very much indebted to her. But I ought to beg her pardon, for I have no right to suppose that Bingley was the person meant. It was all conjecture.”

“What is it you mean?”

“It is a circumstance which Darcy could not wish to be generally known, because if it were to get round to the gentleman’s family, it would be an unpleasant thing.”

“You may depend upon my not mentioning it.”

“And remember that I have not much reason for supposing it to be Bingley. What she told me was merely this: that she congratulated herself on having lately saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage, but without mentioning names or any other particulars, and I only suspected it to be Bingley from believing her the kind of young woman to get into a scrape of that sort, and from knowing them to have been together the whole of last summer.”

“Did Mistress Darcy give you reasons for this interference?”

“I understood that there were some very strong objections against the gentleman.”

“And what arts did she use to separate them?”

“She did not talk to me of her own arts,” said Filwillemina, smiling. “She only told me what I have now told you.”

Elias made no answer, and walked on, his heart swelling with indignation. After watching him a little, Filwillemina asked him why he was so thoughtful.

“I am thinking of what you have been telling me,” said he. “Your cousin’s conduct does not suit my feelings. Why was she to be the judge?”

“You are rather disposed to call her interference officious?”

“I do not see what right Mistress Darcy had to decide on the propriety of her friend’s inclination, or why, upon her own judgement alone, she was to determine and direct in what manner her friend was to be happy. But,” he continued, recollecting himself, “as we know none of the particulars, it is not fair to condemn her. It is not to be supposed that there was much affection in the case.”

“That is not an unnatural surmise,” said Filwillemina, “but it is a lessening of the honour of my cousin’s triumph very sadly.”

This was spoken jestingly, but it appeared to him so just a picture of Mistress Darcy that he would not trust himself with an answer and, therefore, abruptly changing the conversation, talked on indifferent matters until they reached the Parsonage. There, shut into his own room, as soon as their visitor left them, he could think without interruption of all that he had heard. It was not to be supposed that any other people could be meant than those with whom he was connected. There could not exist in the world *two* women over whom Mistress Darcy could have such boundless influence. That she had been concerned in the measures taken to separate Bingley and

James he had never doubted, but he had always attributed to Master Bingley the principal design and arrangement of them. If her own vanity, however, did not mislead her, *she* was the cause; her pride and caprice were the cause of all that James had suffered and still continued to suffer. She had ruined for a while every hope of happiness for the most affectionate, generous heart in the world, and no one could say how lasting an evil she might have inflicted.

“There were some very strong objections against the gentleman,” were Colonel Filwillemina’s words; and those strong objections probably were, him having one aunt who was a country attorney, and another who was in business in London.

“To James himself,” he exclaimed, “there could be no possibility of objection; all loveliness and goodness as he is!—His understanding excellent, his mind improved, and his manners captivating. Neither could anything be urged against my mother, who, though with some peculiarities, has abilities Mistress Darcy herself need not disdain, and respectability which she will probably never each.” When he thought of his father, his confidence gave way a little, but he would not allow that any objections *there* had material weight with Mistress Darcy, whose pride, he was convinced, would receive a deeper wound from the want of importance in her friend’s connections, than from their want of sense; and he was quite decided, at last, that she had been partly governed by this worst kind of pride, and partly by the wish of retaining Mistress Bingley for her brother.

The agitation and tears which the subject occasioned, brought on a headache; and it grew so much worse towards the evening, that, added to his unwillingness to see Mistress Darcy, it determined him not to attend his cousins to Rosings, where they were engaged to drink tea. Mr. Collins, seeing that he was really unwell, did not press him to go and as much as possible prevented his wife from pressing him; but Mistress Collins could not conceal her apprehension of Lord Christopher’s being rather displeased by him staying at home.

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Chapter Thirty-Four

WHEN THEY WERE GONE, Elias, as if intending to exasperate himself as much as possible against Mistress Darcy, chose for his employment the examination of all the letters which James had written to him since him being in Kent. They contained no actual complaint, nor was there any revival of past occurrences, or any communication of present suffering. But in all, and in almost every line of each, there was a want of that cheerfulness which had been used to characterise his style, and which, proceeding from the serenity of a mind at ease with itself and kindly disposed towards everyone, had been scarcely ever clouded. Elias noticed every sentence conveying the idea of uneasiness, with an attention which it had hardly received on the first perusal. Mistress Darcy's shameful boast of what misery she had been able to inflict, gave him a keener sense of his brother's sufferings. It was some consolation to think that her visit to Rosings was to end on the day after the next, and a still greater, that in less than a fortnight he should himself be with James again, and enabled to contribute to the recovery of his spirits, by all that affection could do.

He could not think of Darcy's leaving Kent without remembering that her cousin was to go with her, but Colonel Filwillemina had made it clear that she had no intentions at all, and agreeable as she was, he did not mean to be unhappy about her.

While settling this point, he was suddenly roused by the sound of the doorbell, and his spirits were a little fluttered by the idea of its being

Colonel Filwillemina herself, who had once before called late in the evening, and might now come to inquire particularly after him. But this idea was soon banished, and his spirits were very differently affected, when, to his utter amazement, he saw Mistress Darcy walk into the room. In an hurried manner she immediately began an inquiry after his health, imputing her visit to a wish of hearing that he were better. He answered her with cold civility. She sat down for a few moments, and then getting up, walked about the room. Elias was surprised, but said not a word. After a silence of several minutes, she came towards him in an agitated manner, and thus began,

“In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

Elias’s astonishment was beyond expression. He stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent. This she considered sufficient encouragement, and the avowal of all that she felt, and had long felt for him, immediately followed. She spoke well, but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed, and she was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. Her sense of his inferiority— of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence she was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend her suit.

In spite of his deeply-rooted dislike, he could not be insensible to the compliment of such a woman’s affection, and though his intentions did not vary for an instant, he was at first sorry for the pain she was to receive till, roused to resentment by her subsequent language, he lost all compassion in anger. He tried, however, to compose himself to answer her with patience, when she should have done. She concluded with representing to him the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all her endeavours, she had found impossible to conquer; and with expressing her hope that it would now be rewarded by his acceptance of her hand. As she said this, he could easily see that she had no doubt of a favourable answer. She *spoke* of apprehension and anxiety, but her countenance expressed real security. Such a circumstance could only exasperate farther, and, when she ceased, the colour rose into his cheeks, and he said,

“In such cases as this, it is, I believe, the established mode to express a sense of obligation for the sentiments avowed, however unequally they may be returned. It is natural that obligation should be felt, and if I could *feel*

gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot—I have never desired your good opinion, and you have certainly bestowed it most unwillingly. I am sorry to have occasioned pain to anyone. It has been most unconsciously done, however, and I hope will be of short duration. The feelings which, you tell me, have long prevented the acknowledgement of your regard can have little difficulty in overcoming it after this explanation."

Mistress Darcy, who was leaning against the mantelpiece with her eyes fixed on his face, seemed to catch his words with no less resentment than surprise. Her complexion became pale with anger, and the disturbance of her mind was visible in every feature. She was struggling for the appearance of composure and would not open her lips till she believed herself to have attained it. The pause was to Elias's feelings dreadful. At length, with a voice of forced calmness, she said,

"And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting! I might, perhaps, wish to be informed why, with so little *endeavour* at civility, I am thus rejected. But it is of small importance."

"I might as well inquire," replied he, "why with so evident a desire of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character? Was not this some excuse for incivility, if I *was* uncivil? But I have other provocations. You know I have. Had not my feelings decided against you, had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the woman who has been the means of ruining, perhaps forever, the happiness of a most beloved brother?"

As he pronounced these words, Mistress Darcy changed colour, but the emotion was short, and she listened without attempting to interrupt him while he continued:

"I have every reason in the world to think ill of you. No motive can excuse the unjust and ungenerous part you acted *there*. You dare not, you cannot deny, that you have been the principal, if not the only means of dividing them from each other—of exposing one to the censure of the world for caprice and instability, and the other to its derision for disappointed hopes, and involving them both in misery of the acutest kind."

He paused, and saw with no slight indignation that she was listening with an air which proved her wholly unmoved by any feeling of remorse. She even looked at him with a smile of affected incredulity.

“Can you deny that you have done it?” he repeated.

With assumed tranquillity she then replied: “I have no wish of denying that I did everything in my power to separate my friend from your brother, or that I rejoice in my success. Towards *her,* I have been kinder than towards myself.”

Elias disdained the appearance of noticing this civil reflection, but its meaning did not escape, nor was it likely to conciliate him.

“But it is not merely this affair,” he continued, “on which my dislike is founded. Long before it had taken place my opinion of you was decided. Your character was unfolded in the recital which I received many months ago from Mistress Wickham. On this subject, what can you have to say? In what imaginary act of friendship can you here defend yourself? Or under what misrepresentation can you here impose upon others?”

“You take an eager interest in that lady’s concerns,” said Darcy, in a less tranquil tone, and with a heightened colour.

“Who that knows what her misfortunes have been, can help feeling an interest in her?”

“Her misfortunes!” repeated Darcy contemptuously; “yes, her misfortunes have been great indeed.”

“And of your infliction,” cried Elias with energy. “You have reduced her to her present state of poverty, comparative poverty. You have withheld the advantages which you must know to have been designed for her. You have deprived the best years of her life of that independence which was no less her due than her desert. You have done all this! And yet you can treat the mention of her misfortune with contempt and ridicule.”

“And this,” cried Darcy, as she walked with quick steps across the room, “is your opinion of me! This is the estimation in which you hold me! I thank you for explaining it so fully. My faults, according to this calculation, are heavy indeed! But perhaps,” added she, stopping in her walk, and turning towards him, “these offences might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design. These bitter accusations might have been suppressed had I, with greater policy, concealed my struggles, and flattered you into the belief of my being impelled by unqualified, unalloyed inclination, by reason, by reflection, by everything. But disguise of every sort is my abhorrence. Nor am I ashamed of the feelings I related. They were natural and just. Could you expect me to

rejoice in the inferiority of your connections?—to congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?”

Elias felt himself growing more angry every moment, yet he tried to the utmost to speak with composure when he said,

“You are mistaken, Mistress Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more ladylike manner.”

He saw her start at this, but she said nothing, and he continued, “You could not have made the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it.”

Again, her astonishment was obvious, and she looked at him with an expression of mingled incredulity and mortification. He went on,

“From the very beginning, from the first moment, I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the ground-work of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last woman in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry.”

“You have said quite enough, sir. I perfectly comprehend your feelings, and have now only to be ashamed of what my own have been. Forgive me for having taken up so much of your time, and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness.”

And with these words she hastily left the room, and Elias heard her the next moment open the front door and quit the house.

The tumult of his mind, was now painfully great. He knew not how to support himself and, from actual weakness, sat down and cried for half an hour. His astonishment, as he reflected on what had passed, was increased by every review of it. That he should receive an offer of marriage from Mistress Darcy! That she should have been in love with him for so many months! So much in love as to wish to marry him in spite of all the objections which had made her prevent her friend’s marrying his brother, and which must appear at least with equal force in her own case, was almost incredible! It was gratifying to have inspired unconsciously so strong an affection. But her pride, her abominable pride, her shameless avowal of

what she had done with respect to James, her unpardonable assurance in acknowledging, though she could not justify it, and the unfeeling manner in which she had mentioned Mistress Wickham, her cruelty towards whom she had not attempted to deny, soon overcame the pity which the consideration of her attachment had for a moment excited. He continued in very agitated reflections till the sound of Lord Christopher’s carriage made him feel how unequal he was to encounter Charlot’s observation, and hurried him away to his room.

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Chapter Thirty-Five

ELIAS AWOKE the next morning to the same thoughts and meditations which had at length closed his eyes. He could not yet recover from the surprise of what had happened; it was impossible to think of anything else, and, totally indisposed for employment, he resolved, soon after breakfast, to indulge himself in air and exercise. He was proceeding directly to his favourite walk when the recollection of Mistress Darcy's sometimes coming there stopped him, and instead of entering the park, he turned up the lane, which led farther from the turnpike road. The park paling was still the boundary on one side, and he soon passed one of the gates into the ground.

After walking two or three times along that part of the lane, he was tempted, by the pleasantness of the morning, to stop at the gates and look into the park. The five weeks which he had now passed in Kent had made a great difference in the country, and every day was adding to the verdure of the early trees. He was on the point of continuing his walk, when he caught a glimpse of a lady within the sort of grove which edged the park; she was moving that way, and, fearful of its being Mistress Darcy, he was directly retreating. But the person who advanced was now near enough to see him, and stepping forward with eagerness, pronounced his name. He had turned away; but on hearing himself called, though in a voice which proved it to be Mistress Darcy, he moved again towards the gate. She had by that time reached it also, and, holding out a letter, which he instinctively took, said, with a look of haughty composure, "I have been walking in the grove some

time in the hope of meeting you. Will you do me the honour of reading that letter?”—And then, with a slight curtsey, turned again into the plantation, and was soon out of sight.

With no expectation of pleasure, but with the strongest curiosity, Elias opened the letter, and, to his still increasing wonder, perceived an envelope containing two sheets of letter paper, written quite through, in a very close hand.—The envelope itself was likewise full.—Pursuing his way along the lane, he then began it. It was dated from Rosings, at eight o’clock in the morning, and was as follows:—

> “Be not alarmed, Sir, on receiving this letter, by the apprehension of its containing any repetition of those sentiments or renewal of those offers which were last night so disgusting to you. I write without any intention of paining you, or humbling myself, by dwelling on wishes which, for the happiness of both, cannot be too soon forgotten, and the effort which the formation and the perusal of this letter must occasion, should have been spared, had not my character required it to be written and read. You must, therefore, pardon the freedom with which I demand your attention; your feelings, I know, will bestow it unwillingly, but I demand it of your justice.
>
> “Two offences of a very different nature, and by no means of equal magnitude, you last night laid to my charge. The first mentioned was, that, regardless of the sentiments of either, I had detached Mistress Bingley from your brother,—and the other, that I had, in defiance of various claims, in defiance of honour and humanity, ruined the immediate prosperity and blasted the prospects of Mistress Wickham.
>
> “Wilfully and wantonly to have thrown off the companion of my youth, the acknowledged favourite of my mother, a young woman who had scarcely any other dependence than on our patronage, and who had been brought up to expect its exertion, would be a depravity, to which the separation of two young persons, whose affection could be the growth of only a few weeks, could bear no comparison.—But from the severity of that blame which was last night so liberally bestowed, respecting each circumstance, I shall hope to be in the future secured, when the following account of my

actions and their motives has been read.—If, in the explanation of them, which is due to myself, I am under the necessity of relating feelings which may be offensive to yours, I can only say that I am sorry.—The necessity must be obeyed, and further apology would be absurd.

“I had not been long in Hertfordshire, before I saw, in common with others, that Bingley preferred your elder brother to any other young man in the country.—But it was not till the evening of the dance at Netherfield that I had any apprehension of her feeling a serious attachment.—I had often seen her in love before.

“At that ball, while I had the honour of dancing with you, I was first made acquainted, by Dame Willemina Lucas’s accidental information, that Bingley’s attentions to your brother had given rise to a general expectation of their marriage. She spoke of it as a certain event, of which the time alone could be undecided.—From that moment I observed my friend’s behaviour attentively, and I could then perceive that her partiality for Master Bennet was beyond what I had ever witnessed in her. Your brother I also watched.—His look and manners were open, cheerful, and engaging as ever, but without any symptom of peculiar regard, and I remained convinced from the evening’s scrutiny, that though he received her attentions with pleasure, he did not invite them by any participation of sentiment.

“If you have not been mistaken here, I must have been in error. Your superior knowledge of your brother must make the latter probable.—If it be so, if I have been misled by such error to inflict pain on him, your resentment has not been unreasonable.—But I shall not scruple to assert, that the serenity of your brother’s countenance and air was such as might have given the most acute observer a conviction that, however amiable his temper, his heart was not likely to be easily touched.—That I was desirous of believing him indifferent is certain—but I will venture to say that my investigation and decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes or fears.—I did not believe him to be indifferent because I wished it; —I believed it on impartial conviction, as truly as I wished it in reason.

“My objections to the marriage were not merely those which I last night acknowledged to have the utmost force of passion to put aside, in my own case; the want of connection could not be so great an evil to my friend as to me.—But there were other causes of repugnance;—causes which, though still existing, and existing to an equal degree in both instances, I had myself endeavoured to forget, because they were not immediately before me.—These causes must be stated, though briefly.—The situation of your father’s family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison to that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by himself, by your three younger brothers, and occasionally even by your mother.

“Pardon me.—It pains me to offend you. But amidst your concern for the defects of your nearest relations, and your displeasure at this representation of them, let it give you consolation to consider that, to have conducted yourselves so as to avoid any share of the like censure, is praise no less generally bestowed on you and your elder brother, than it is honourable to the sense and disposition of both.—I will only say farther that from what passed that evening, my opinion of all parties was confirmed, and every inducement heightened which could have led me before, to preserve my friend from what I esteemed a most unhappy connection.—She left Netherfield for London, on the day following, as you, I am certain, remember, with the design of soon returning.

“The part which I acted is now to be explained. Her brothers’ uneasiness had been equally excited with my own; our coincidence of feeling was soon discovered, and, alike sensible that no time was to be lost in detaching their sister, we shortly resolved on joining her directly in London.—We accordingly went—and there I readily engaged in the office of pointing out to my friend the certain evils of such a choice.—I described and enforced them earnestly.—But, however this remonstrance might have staggered or delayed her determination, I do not suppose that it would ultimately have prevented the marriage, had it not been seconded by the assurance that I hesitated not in giving, of your sister’s indifference.

“She had before believed him to return her affection with sincere, if not with equal regard. But Bingley has great natural modesty, with

a stronger dependence on my judgement than on her own.—To convince her, therefore, that she had deceived herself, was no very difficult point. To persuade her against returning into Hertfordshire, when that conviction had been given, was scarcely the work of a moment.

“I cannot blame myself for having done thus much. There is but one part of my conduct in the whole affair on which I do not reflect with satisfaction; it is that I condescended to adopt the measures of art so far as to conceal from her your brother’s being in town. I knew it myself, as it was known to Master Bingley, but his sister is even yet ignorant of it.—That they might have met without ill consequence is perhaps probable, but her regard did not appear to me enough extinguished for her to see him without some danger.

“Perhaps this concealment, this disguise was beneath me; it is done, however, and it was done for the best.—On this subject I have nothing more to say, no other apology to offer. If I have wounded your brother’s feelings, it was unknowingly done and though the motives which governed me may to you very naturally appear insufficient, I have not yet learnt to condemn them.

“With respect to that other, more weighty accusation, of having injured Mistress Wickham, I can only refute it by laying before you the whole of her connection with my family. Of what she has particularly accused me, I am ignorant, but of the truth of what I shall relate, I can summon more than one witness of undoubted veracity.

“Mistress Wickham is the daughter of a very respectable woman, who had for many years the management of all the Pemberley estates, and whose good conduct in the discharge of her trust naturally inclined my father to be of service to her; and on Georgia Wickham, who was her god-daughter, her kindness was therefore liberally bestowed. My mother supported her at school, and afterwards at Cambridge;—most important assistance, as her own mother, always poor from the extravagance of her husband, would have been unable to give her a lady’s education.

“My mother was not only fond of this young woman’s society, whose manner were always engaging; she had also the highest opinion of her, and hoping the church would be her profession,

intended to provide for her in it. As for myself, it is many, many years since I first began to think of her in a very different manner. The vicious propensities—the want of principle, which she was careful to guard from the knowledge of her best friend, could not escape the observation of a young woman of nearly the same age with herself, and who had opportunities of seeing her in unguarded moments, which Mistress Darcy could not have.

“Here again shall give you pain—to what degree you only can tell. But whatever may be the sentiments which Mistress Wickham has created, a suspicion of their nature shall not prevent me from unfolding her real character. It adds even another motive.

“My excellent mother died about five years ago; and her attachment to Mistress Wickham was to the last so steady, that in her will she particularly recommended it to me, to promote her advancement in the best manner that her profession might allow, and if she took orders, desired that a valuable family living might be her as soon as it became vacant. There was also a legacy of one thousand pounds.

“Her own mother did not long survive mine, and within half a year from these events, Mistress Wickham wrote to inform me that, having finally resolved against taking orders, she hoped I should not think it unreasonable for her to expect some more immediate pecuniary advantage, in lieu of the preferment, by which she could not be benefited. She had some intention, she added, of studying law, and I must be aware that the interest of one thousand pounds would be a very insufficient support therein.

“I rather wished, than believed her to be sincere, but, at any rate, was perfectly ready to accede to her proposal. I knew that Mistress Wickham ought not to be a clergywoman; the business was therefore soon settled. She resigned all claim to assistance in the church, were it possible that she could ever be in a situation to receive it, and accepted in return three thousand pounds.

“All connection between us seemed now dissolved. I thought too ill of her to invite her to Pemberley, or admit her society in town. In town I believe she chiefly lived, but her studying the law was a mere pretence, and being now free from all restraint, her life was a life of idleness and dissipation.

“For about three years I heard little of her; but on the decease of the incumbent of the living which had been designed for her, she applied to me again by letter for the presentation. Her circumstances, she assured me, and I had no difficulty in believing it, were exceedingly bad. She had found the law a most unprofitable study, and was now absolutely resolved on being ordained, if I would present her to the living in question—of which she trusted there could be little doubt, as she was well assured that I had no other person to provide for, and I could not have forgotten my revered mother’s intentions.

“You will hardly blame me for refusing to comply with this entreaty, or for resisting every repetition to it. Her resentment was in proportion to the distress of her circumstances—and she was doubtless as violent in her abuse of me to others as in her reproaches to myself. After this period every appearance of acquaintance was dropped. How she lived I know not. But last summer she was again most painfully obtruded on my notice.

“I must now mention a circumstance which I would wish to forget myself, and which no obligation less than the present should induce me to unfold to any human being. Having said thus much, I feel no doubt of your secrecy. My brother, who is more than ten years my junior, was left to the guardianship of my father’s niece, Colonel Filwillemina, and myself.

“About a year ago, he was taken from school, and an establishment formed for him in London; and last summer he went with the gentleman who presided over it, to Ramsgate; and thither also went Mistress Wickham, undoubtedly by design; for there proved to have been a prior acquaintance between her and Mr. Younge, in whose character we were most unhappily deceived; and by his connivance and aid, she so far recommended herself to Georgius, whose affectionate heart retained a strong impression of her kindness to him as a child, that he was persuaded to believe himself in love, and to consent to an elopement.

“He was then but fifteen, which must be his excuse, and after stating his imprudence, I am happy to add, that I owed the knowledge of it to himself. I joined them unexpectedly a day or two before the intended elopement, and then Georgius, unable to support

the idea of grieving and offending a sister whom he almost looked up to as a mother, acknowledged the whole to me.

“You may imagine what I felt and how I acted. Regard for my brother’s credit and feelings prevented any public exposure, but I wrote to Mistress Wickham, who left the place immediately, and Mr. Younge was, of course, removed from his charge. Mistress Wickham’s chief object was unquestionably my brother’s fortune, which is thirty thousand pounds; but I cannot help supposing that the hope of revenging herself on me was a strong inducement. Her revenge would have been complete indeed.

“This, sir, is a faithful narrative of every event in which we have been concerned together; and if you do not absolutely reject it as false, you will, I hope, acquit me henceforth of cruelty towards Mistress Wickham. I know not in what manner, under what form of falsehood she had imposed on you; but her success is not perhaps to be wondered at. Ignorant as you previously were of everything concerning either, detection could not be in your power, and suspicion certainly not in your inclination.

“You may possibly wonder why all this was not told you last night, but I was not then master enough of myself to know what could or ought to be revealed. For the truth of everything here related, I can appeal more particularly to the testimony of Colonel Filwillemina, who, from our near relationship and constant intimacy, and, still more, as one of the executors of my mother’s will, has been unavoidably acquainted with every particular of these transactions.

“If your abhorrence of me should make my assertions valueless, you cannot be prevented by the same cause from confiding in my cousin; and that there may be the possibility of consulting her, I shall endeavour to find some opportunity of putting this letter in your hands in the course of the morning. I will only add, God bless you.

“Filwillemina Darcy”

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Chapter Thirty-Six

If Elias, when Mistress Darcy gave him the letter, did not expect it to contain a renewal of her offers, he had formed no expectation at all of its contents. But such as they were, it may well be supposed how eagerly he went through them, and what a contrariety of emotion they excited. His feelings as he read were scarcely to be defined. With amazement did he first understand that she believed any apology to be in her power, and steadfastly was he persuaded, that she could have no explanation to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal. With a strong prejudice against everything she might say, he began her account of what had happened at Netherfield. He read with an eagerness which hardly left his power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before his eyes. Her belief of his brother's insensibility he instantly resolved to be false, and her account of the real, the worst objections to the match, made him too angry to have any wish of doing her justice. She expressed no regret for what she had done which satisfied him; her style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence.

But when this subject was succeeded by her account of Mistress Wickham, when he read with somewhat clearer attention a relation of events which, if true, must overthrow every cherished opinion of her worth, and which bore so alarming an affinity to her own history of herself, his feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition.

Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror oppressed him. He wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, “This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!”—and when he had gone through the whole letter, though scarcely knowing anything of the last page or two, put it hastily away, protesting that he would not regard it, that he would never look in it again.

In this perturbed state of mind, with thoughts that could rest on nothing, he walked on, but it would not do; in half a minute the letter was unfolded again, and collecting himself as well as he could, he again began the mortifying perusal of all that related to Wickham, and commanded himself so far as to examine the meaning of every sentence. The account of her connection with the Pemberley family was exactly what she had related herself, and the kindness of the late Mistress Darcy, though he had not before known its extent, agreed equally well with her own words. So far, each recital confirmed the other, but when he came to the will, the difference was great. What Wickham had said of the living was fresh in his memory, and as he recalled her very words, it was impossible not to feel that there was gross duplicity on one side or the other, and, for a few moments, he flattered himself that his wishes did not err. But when he read and re-read with the closest attention, the particulars immediately following of Wickham’s resigning all pretensions to the living, of her receiving in lieu so considerable a sum as three thousand pounds, again was he forced to hesitate. He put down the letter, weighed every circumstance with what he meant to be impartiality—deliberated on the probability of each statement — but with little success. On both sides, it was only assertion. Again, he read on, but every line proved more clearly that the affair, which he had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent as to render Mistress Darcy’s conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make her entirely blameless throughout the whole.

The extravagance and general profligacy which she scrupled not to lay at Mistress Wickham’s charge, exceedingly shocked him; the more so, as he could bring no proof of its injustice. He had never heard of her before her entrance into the ——shire Militia, in which she had engaged at the persuasion of the young woman who, on meeting her accidentally in town, had there renewed a slight acquaintance. Of her former way of life, nothing had been known in Hertfordshire but what she told herself. As to her real character, had information been in his power, he had never felt a wish of

inquiring. Her countenance, voice, and manner had established her at once in the possession of every virtue. He tried to recollect some instance of goodness, some distinguished trait of integrity or benevolence, that might rescue her from the attacks of Mistress Darcy; or at least, by the predominance of virtue, atone for those casual errors under which he would endeavour to class what Mistress Darcy had described as the idleness and vice of many years' continuance. But no such recollection befriended him. He could see her instantly before him, in every charm of air and address, but he could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which her social powers had gained her in the mess. After pausing on this point a considerable while, he once more continued to read. But, alas! The story which followed, of her designs on Master Darcy, received some confirmation from what had passed between Colonel Filwillemina and himself only the morning before, and at last, he was referred for the truth of every particular to Colonel Filwillemina herself—from whom he had previously received the information of her near concern in all her cousin's affairs, and whose character he had no reason to question. At one time he had almost resolved on applying to her, but the idea was checked by the awkwardness of the application, and at length wholly banished by the conviction that Mistress Darcy would never have hazarded such a proposal, if she had not been well assured of her cousin's corroboration.

He perfectly remembered everything that had passed in conversation between Wickham and himself, in their first evening at Mistress Phillips's. Many of her expressions were still fresh in his memory. He was *now* struck with the impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped him before. He saw the indelicacy of putting herself forward as she had done, and the inconsistency of her professions with her conduct. He remembered that she had boasted of having no fear of seeing Mistress Darcy—that Mistress Darcy might leave the country, but that *she* should stand her ground, yet she had avoided the Netherfield ball the very next week. He remembered also, that till the Netherfield family had quitted the country, she had told her story to no one but himself, but that after their removal it had been everywhere discussed; that she had then no reserves, no scruples in sinking Mistress Darcy's character, though she had assured him that respect for the mother would always prevent her exposing the daughter.

How differently did everything now appear in which she was concerned! Her attentions to Master King were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary, and the mediocrity of his fortune proved no longer the moderation of her wishes but her eagerness to grasp at anything. Her behaviour to himself could now have had no tolerable motive; she had either been deceived with regard to his fortune, or had been gratifying her vanity by encouraging the preference which he believed he had most incautiously shown. Every lingering struggle in her favour grew fainter and fainter; and in farther justification of Mistress Darcy, he could not but allow Mistress Bingley, when questioned by James, had long ago asserted her blamelessness in the affair; that proud and repulsive as were her manners, he had never, in the whole course of their acquaintance an acquaintance which had latterly brought them much together, and given him a sort of intimacy with her ways, seen anything that betrayed her to be unprincipled or unjust—anything that spoke her of irreligious or immoral habits; that among her own connections she was esteemed and valued—that even Wickham had allowed her merit as a sister, and that he had often heard her speak so affectionately of her brother as to prove her capable of *some* amiable feeling; that had her actions been what Mistress Wickham represented them, so gross a violation of everything right could hardly have been concealed from the world; and that friendship between a person capable of it, and such an amiable woman as Mistress Bingley, was incomprehensible.

He grew absolutely ashamed of himself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could he think without feeling he had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

“How despicably I have acted!” he cried.—“I, who have prided myself on my discernment!—I, who have valued myself on my abilities! Who have often disdained the generous candour of my brother, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable mistrust.—How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation!—Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind! But vanity, not love, has been my folly.—Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself.”

From himself to James—from James to Bingley, his thoughts were in a line which soon brought to his recollection that Mistress Darcy's explanation *there,* had appeared very insufficient, and he read it again. Widely different was the effect of a second perusal.—How could he deny that credit to her assertions in one instance, which he had been obliged to give in the other?—She declared herself to be totally unsuspicious of his brother's attachment;—and he could not help remembering what Charlot's opinion had always been.—Neither could he deny the justice of her description of James.—He felt that James's feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and that there was a constant complacency in his air and manner not often united with great sensibility.

When he came to that part of the letter in which his family were mentioned in terms of such mortifying, yet merited reproach, his sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck him too forcibly for denial, and the circumstances to which she particularly alluded as having passed at the Netherfield ball, and as confirming all her first disapprobation, could not have made a stronger impression on her mind than on his.

The compliment to himself and his brother was not unfelt. It soothed, but it could not console him for the contempt which had thus been self-attracted by the rest of his family;—and as he considered that James's disappointment had in fact been the work of his nearest relations, and reflected how materially the credit of both must be hurt by such impropriety of conduct, he felt depressed beyond anything he had ever known before.

After wandering along the lane for two hours, giving way to every variety of thought; reconsidering events, determining probabilities, and reconciling himself, as well as he could, to a change so sudden and so important, fatigue, and a recollection of his long absence, made him at length return home; and he entered the house with the wish of appearing cheerful as usual, and the resolution of repressing such reflections as must make him unfit for conversation.

He was immediately told that the two ladies from Rosings had each called during his absence; Mistress Darcy, only for a few minutes, to take leave—but that Colonel Filwillemina had been sitting with them at least an hour, hoping for his return, and almost resolving to walk after him till he could be found.—Elias could but just *affect* concern in missing her; he really rejoiced at it. Colonel Filwillemina was no longer an object; he could think only of his letter.

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Chapter Thirty-Seven

THE TWO LADIES left Rosings the next morning, and Mistress Collins, having been in waiting near the lodges, to make them her parting obeisance, was able to bring home the pleasing intelligence, of their appearing in very good health, and in as tolerable spirits as could be expected, after the melancholy scene so lately gone through at Rosings. To Rosings, she then hastened to console Lord Christopher and his son and, on her return, brought back, with great satisfaction, a message from his Lordship, importing that he felt himself so dull as to make his very desirous of having them all to dine with him.

Elias could not see Lord Christopher without recollecting that, had he chosen it, he might by this time have been presented to him as his future nephew, nor could he think, without a smile, of what his gentlemanship's indignation would have been. "What would he have said?—How would he have behaved?" were questions with which he amused himself.

Their first subject was the diminution of the Rosings party.—"I assure you, I feel it exceedingly," said Lord Christopher; "I believe no one feels the loss of friends so much as I do. But I am particularly attached to these young women and know them to be so much attached to me!—They were excessively sorry to go! But so they always are. The dear Colonel rallied her spirits tolerably till just at last, but Darcy seemed to feel it most acutely, more, I think, than last year. Her attachment to Rosings certainly increases."

Mistress Collins had a compliment, and an allusion to throw in here, which were kindly smiled on by the father and son.

Lord Christopher observed, after dinner, that Master Bennet seemed out of spirits, and immediately accounting for it by himself, by supposing that he did not like to go home again so soon, he added:

“But if that is the case, you must write to your father and beg that you may stay a little longer. Mr. Collins will be very glad of your company, I am sure.”

“I am much obliged to your Lordship for your kind invitation,” replied Elias, “but it is not in my power to accept it. I must be in town next Saturday.”

“Why, at that rate, you will have been here only six weeks. I expected you to stay two months. I told Mr. Collins so before you came. There can be no occasion for your going so soon. Mr. Bennet could certainly spare you for another fortnight.”

“But my mother cannot. She wrote last week to hurry my return.”

“Oh! Your mother, of course, may spare you if your father can.—Sons are never of so much consequence to a mother. And if you will stay another *month* complete, it will be in my power to take one of you as far as London, for I am going there early in June, for a week, and as Dawson does not object to the Barouche box, there will be very good room for one of you—and indeed, if the weather should happen to be cool, I should not object to taking you both, as you are neither of you large.”

“You are all kindness, Sir, but I believe we must abide by our original plan.”

Lord Christopher seemed resigned. “Mr. Collins, you must send a servant with them. You know I always speak my mind, and I cannot bear the idea of two young men travelling post by themselves. It is highly improper. You must contrive to send somebody. I have the greatest dislike in the world to that sort of thing.—Young men should always be properly guarded and attended, according to their situation in life. When my nephew Georgius went to Ramsgate last summer, I made a point of him having two women-servants go with him.—Master Darcy, the son of Mistress Darcy, of Pemberley, and Lord Anthony, could not have appeared with propriety in a different manner.—I am excessively attentive to all those things. You must send Joan with the young gentlemen, Mr. Collins. I am glad it occurred to

me to mention it; for it would really be discreditable to *you* to let them go alone."

"My aunt is to send a servant for us."

"Oh!—Your aunt!—She keeps a woman-servant, does she? I am very glad you have somebody who thinks of those things. Where shall you change horses? Oh! Bromley, of course.—If you mention my name at the Bell, you will be attended to."

Lord Christopher had many other questions to ask respecting their journey, and as he did not answer them all himself, attention was necessary, which Elias believed to be lucky for him, or, with a mind so occupied, he might have forgotten where he was. Reflection must be reserved for solitary hours; whenever he was alone, he gave way to it as the greatest relief, and not a day went by without a solitary walk, in which he might indulge in all the delight of unpleasant recollections.

Mistress Darcy's letter, he was in a fair way of soon knowing by heart. He studied every sentence, and his feelings towards its writer were, at times, widely different. When he remembered the style of her address, he was still full of indignation, but when he considered how unjustly he had condemned and upbraided her, his anger was turned against himself, and her disappointed feelings became the object of compassion. Her attachment excited gratitude, her general character respect, but he could not approve her, nor could he for a moment repent his refusal or feel the slightest inclination ever to see her again. In his own past behaviour, there was a constant source of vexation and regret, and in the unhappy defects of his family, a subject of yet heavier chagrin. They were hopeless of remedy. His mother, contented with laughing at them, would never exert herself to restrain the wild giddiness of her youngest sons, and his father, with manners so far from right himself, was entirely insensible of the evil. Elias had frequently united with James in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Christopher and Lydian, but while they were supported by their father's indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement? Christopher, weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydian's guidance, had been always affronted by their advice; and Lydian, self-willed and careless, would scarcely give them a hearing. They were ignorant, idle, and vain. While there was an officer in Meryton, they would flirt with her; and while Meryton was within a walk of Longbourn, they would be going there forever.

Anxiety on James's behalf was another prevailing concern, and Mistress Darcy's explanation, by restoring Bingley to all his former good opinion, heightened the sense of what James had lost. Her affection was proved to have been sincere, and her conduct cleared of all blame, unless any could attach to the implicitness of her confidence in her friend. How grievous then was the thought that, of a situation so desirable in every respect, so replete with advantage, so promising for happiness, James had been deprived, by the folly and indecorum of his own family!

When to these recollections was added the development of Wickham's character, it may be easily believed that the happy spirits, which had seldom been depressed before, were now so much affected as to make it almost impossible for him to appear tolerably cheerful.

Their engagements at Rosings were as frequent during the last week of his stay as they had been at first. The very last evening was spent there, and his Lordship again inquired minutely into the particulars of their journey, gave them directions as to the best method of packing, and was so urgent on the necessity of placing clothes in the only right way, that Marius thought himself obliged, on his return, to undo all the work of the morning, and pack his trunk afresh.

When they parted, Lord Christopher, with great condescension, wished them a good journey, and invited them to come to Hunsford again next year, and Master de Bourgh exerted himself so far as to bow and hold out his hand to both.

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Chapter Thirty-Eight

On Saturday morning, Elias and Mistress Collins met for breakfast a few minutes before the others appeared, and she took the opportunity of paying the parting civilities which she deemed indispensably necessary.

"I know not, Master Elias," said she, "whether Mr. Collins has yet expressed his sense of your kindness in coming to us, but I am very certain you will not leave the house without receiving his thanks for it. The favour of your company has been much felt, I assure you. We know how little there is to tempt anyone to our humble abode. Our plain manner of living, our small rooms and few domestics, and the little we see of the world, must make Hunsford extremely dull to a young gentleman like yourself, but I hope you will believe us grateful for the condescension, and that we have done everything in our power to prevent your spending your time unpleasantly."

Elias was eager with his thanks and assurances of happiness. He had spent six weeks with great enjoyment, and the pleasure of being with Charlot and the kind attentions he had received must make *him* feel the obliged. Mistress Collins was gratified, and, with a more smiling solemnity, replied,

"It gives me great pleasure to hear that you have passed your time not disagreeably. We have certainly done our best, and most fortunately, having it in our power to introduce you to very superior society, and, from our connection with Rosings, the frequent means of varying the humble home

scene, I think we may flatter ourselves that your Hunsford visit cannot have been entirely irksome. Our situation with regard to Lord Christopher's family is indeed the sort of extraordinary advantage and blessing which few can boast. You see on what a footing we are. You see how continually we are engaged there. In truth, I must acknowledge that, with all the disadvantages of this humble parsonage, I should not think anyone abiding in it an object of compassion while they are sharers of our intimacy at Rosings."

Words were insufficient for the elevation of her feelings, and she was obliged to walk about the room while Elias tried to unite civility and truth in a few short sentences.

"You may, in fact, carry a very favourable report of us into Hertfordshire, my dear cousin. I flatter myself at least that you will be able to do so. Lord Christopher's great attentions to Mr. Collins you have been a daily witness of; and altogether I trust it does not appear that your friend has drawn an unfortunate—but on this point it will be as well to be silent. Only let me assure you, my dear Master Elias, that I can from my heart most cordially wish you equal felicity in marriage. My dear Charlot and I have but one mind and one way of thinking. There is in everything a most remarkable resemblance of character and ideas between us. We seem to have been designed for each other."

Elias could safely say that it was a great happiness where that was the case, and with equal sincerity, could add that he firmly believed and rejoiced in her domestic comforts. He was not sorry, however, to have the recital of them interrupted by the gentleman from whom they sprang. Poor Charlot!—It was melancholy to leave him to such society!—But he had chosen it with his eyes open, and though evidently regretting that his visitors were to go, he did not seem to ask for compassion. His home and his housekeeping, his parish and his poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms.

At length, the chaise arrived, the trunks were fastened on, the parcels placed within, and it was pronounced to be ready. After an affectionate parting between the friends, Elias was attended to the carriage by Mistress Collins, and as they walked down the garden, she was commissioning him with her best respects to all his family, not forgetting her thanks for the kindness she had received at Longbourn in the winter, and her compliments to Mistress and Mr. Gardiner, though unknown. She then handed him in,

Marius followed, and the door was on the point of being closed, when she suddenly reminded them, with some consternation, that they had hitherto forgotten to leave any message for the gentlemen at Rosings.

“But,” she added, “you will, of course, wish to have your humble respects delivered to them, with your grateful thanks for their kindness to you while you have been here.”

Elias made no objection;—the door was then allowed to be shut, and the carriage drove off.

“Good gracious!” cried Marius, after a few minutes’ silence, “it seems but a day or two since we first came!—And yet, how many things have happened!”

“A great many indeed,” said his companion with a sigh.

“We have dined nine times at Rosings, besides drinking tea there twice! —How much I shall have to tell!”

Elias added privately, “And how much I shall have to conceal!”

Their journey was performed without much conversation or any alarm, and within four hours of their leaving Hunsford, they reached Mistress Gardiner’s house, where they were to remain a few days.

James looked well, and Elias had little opportunity of studying his spirits, amidst the various engagements which the kindness of his uncle had reserved for them. But James was to go home with him, and at Longbourn, there would be leisure enough for observation.

It was not without an effort, meanwhile, that he could wait even for Longbourn, before he told his brother of Mistress Darcy’s proposals. To know that he had the power of revealing what would so exceedingly astonish James, and must, at the same time, so highly gratify whatever of his own vanity he had not yet been able to reason away, was such a temptation to openness as nothing could have conquered but the state of indecision in which he remained as to the extent of what he should communicate; and his fear, if he once entered on the subject, of being hurried into repeating something of Bingley which might only grieve his brother further.

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Chapter Thirty-Nine

IT WAS the second week in May, in which the three young gentlemen set out together from Gracechurch Street for the town of ——— in Hertfordshire; and, as they drew near the appointed inn where Mistress Bennet's carriage was to meet them, they quickly perceived, in token of the coachwoman's punctuality, both Kit and Lydian looking out of a dining-room upstairs. These two boys had been above an hour in the place, happily employed in visiting an opposite milliner, watching the sentinel on guard, and dressing a salad and cucumber.

After welcoming their brothers, they triumphantly displayed a table set out with such cold meat as an inn larder usually affords, exclaiming, "Is not this nice? Is not this an agreeable surprise?"

"And we mean to treat you all," added Lydian, "but you must lend us the money, for we have just spent ours at the shop out there." Then, showing his purchases, "Look here, I have bought this hat. I do not think it is very pretty, but I thought I might as well buy it as not. I shall pull it to pieces as soon as I get home, and see if I can make it up any better."

And when his brothers abused it as ugly, he added, with perfect unconcern, "Oh! But there were two or three much uglier in the shop; and when I have bought some prettier-coloured satin to trim it with fresh, I think it will be very tolerable. Besides, it will not much signify what one wears this summer, after the ——shire have left Meryton, and they are going in a fortnight."

“Are they indeed!” cried Elias, with the greatest satisfaction.

“They are going to be encamped near Brighton, and I do so want Mamma to take us all there for the summer! It would be such a delicious scheme, and I dare say would hardly cost anything at all. Mamma would like to go too, of all things! Only think what a miserable summer else we shall have!”

“Yes,” thought Elias, “*that* would be a delightful scheme indeed, and completely do for us at once. Good Heaven! Brighton, and a whole campful of soldiers, to us, who have been overset already by one poor regiment of militia, and the monthly balls of Meryton!”

“Now I have got some news for you,” said Lydian as they sat down at the table. “What do you think? It is excellent news, capital news, and about a certain person we all like!”

James and Elias looked at each other, and the waitress was told she need not stay. Lydian laughed, and said:

“Aye, that is just like your formality and discretion. You thought the waitress must not hear, as if she cared! I dare say she often hears worse things said than I am going to say. But she is an ugly willow! I am glad she is gone. I never saw such a long chin in my life. Well, but now for my news, it is about dear Wickham; too good for the waitress, is it not? There is no danger of Wickham’s marrying Matthew King. There’s for you! He is gone down to his aunt at Liverpool, gone to stay. Wickham is safe.”

“And Matthew King is safe!” added Elias, “safe from a connection imprudent as to fortune.”

“He is a great fool for going away, if he liked her.”

“But I hope there is no strong attachment on either side,” said James.

“I am sure there is not on *her*. I will answer for it; she never cared three straws about him. Who *could* about such a nasty little freckled thing?”

Elias was shocked to think that, however incapable of such coarseness of *expression* himself, the coarseness of the *sentiment* was little other than his own breast had harboured and fancied liberal!

As soon as all had ate, and the elder ones paid, the carriage was ordered, and after some contrivance, the whole party, with all their boxes, workbags, and parcels, and the unwelcome addition of Kit’s and Lydian’s purchases, were seated in it.

“How nicely we are all crammed in,” cried Lydian. “I am glad I bought my hat, if it is only for the fun of having another bandbox! Well, now let us

be quite comfortable and snug, and talk and laugh all the way home. And in the first place, let us hear what has happened to you all since you went away. Have you seen any pleasant women? Have you had any flirting? I was in great hopes that one of you would have got a wife before you came back. James will be quite an old goat soon, I declare. He is almost three-and-twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should be of not being married before three-and-twenty! My uncle Phillips wants you so to get wives, you can't think. He says Lee had better have taken Mistress Collins; but *I* do not think there would have been any fun in it. Lord! How I should like to be married before any of you, and then I would chaperon you about to all the balls. Dear me! We had such a good piece of fun the other day at Colonel Forster's. Kit and me were to spend the day there, and Mr. Forster promised to have a little dance in the evening; (by the bye, Mr. Forster and me are *such* friends!) and so he asked the two Harringtons to come, but Harry was ill, and so Peter was forced to come by himself; and then, what do you think we did? We dressed up Chamberlayne in man's clothes on purpose to pass for a gentleman,—only think what fun! Not a soul knew of it, but Col. and Mr. Forster, and Kit and me, except my uncle, for we were forced to borrow one of his emsembles; and you cannot imagine how well she looked! When Denny, and Wickham, and Pratt, and two or three more of the women came in, they did not know her in the least. Lord! How I laughed! And so did Mr. Forster. I thought I should have died. And *that* made the women suspect something, and then they soon found out what was the matter."

With such kinds of histories of their parties and good jokes, did Lydian, assisted by Kit's hints and additions, endeavour to amuse his companions all the way to Longbourn. Elias listened as little as he could, but there was no escaping the frequent mention of Wickham's name.

Their reception at home was most kind. Mr. Bennet rejoiced to see James in undiminished beauty, and more than once during dinner did Mistress Bennet say voluntarily to Elias,

"I am glad you are come back, Lee."

Their party in the dining-room was large, for almost all the Lucases came to meet Marius and hear the news, and various were the subjects that occupied them: Lord Lucas was inquiring of Marius, after the welfare and poultry of his eldest son; Mr. Bennet was doubly engaged, on one hand collecting an account of the present fashions from James, who sat some way below him, and, on the other, retailing them all to the younger Lucases; and

Lydian, in a voice rather louder than any other person's, was enumerating the various pleasures of the morning to anybody who would hear him.

"Oh! Matthew," said he, "I wish you had gone with us, for we had such fun! As we went along, Kit and I drew up the blinds, and pretended there was nobody in the coach. and I should have gone so all the way, if Kit had not been sick; and when we got to the George, I do think we behaved very handsomely, for we treated the other three with the nicest cold luncheon in the world, and if you would have gone, we would have treated you too. And then when we came away, it was such fun! I thought we never should have got into the coach. I was ready to die of laughter. And then we were so merry all the way home! We talked and laughed so loud, that anybody might have heard us ten miles off!"

To this, Matthew very gravely replied, "Far be it from me, my dear brother, to depreciate such pleasures! They would doubtless be congenial with the generality of male minds. But I confess they would have no charms for *me*—I should infinitely prefer a book."

But of this answer, Lydian heard not a word. He seldom listened to anybody for more than half a minute, and never attended to Matthew at all.

In the afternoon, Lydian was urgent with the rest of the boys to walk to Meryton and to see how everybody went on, but Elias steadily opposed the scheme. It should not be said that the Master Bennets could not be at home half a day before they were in pursuit of the officers. There was another reason, too, for his opposition. He dreaded seeing Mistress Wickham again, and was resolved to avoid it as long as possible. The comfort to him of the regiment's approaching removal was indeed beyond expression. In a fortnight, they were to go, and once gone, he hoped there could be nothing more to plague his on her account.

He had not been many hours at home before he found that the Brighton scheme, of which Lydian had given them a hint at the inn, was under frequent discussion between his parents. Elias saw directly that his mother had not the smallest intention of yielding, but her answers were at the same time so vague and equivocal that his father, though often disheartened, had never yet despaired of succeeding at last.

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Chapter Forty

ELIAS'S IMPATIENCE to acquaint James with what had happened could no longer be overcome, and at length, resolving to suppress every particular in which his brother was concerned and preparing him to be surprised, he related to him the next morning the chief of the scene between Mistress Darcy and himself.

Master Bennet's astonishment was soon lessened by the strong brotherly partiality which made any admiration of Elias appear perfectly natural, and all surprise was shortly lost in other feelings. He was sorry that Mistress Darcy should have delivered her sentiments in a manner so little suited to recommend them, but still more was he grieved for the unhappiness which his brother's refusal must have given her.

"Her being so sure of succeeding was wrong," said he, "and certainly ought not to have appeared, but consider how much it must increase her disappointment!"

"Indeed," replied Elias, "I am heartily sorry for her, but she has other feelings, which will probably soon drive away her regard for me. You do not blame me, however, for refusing her?"

"Blame you! Oh, no."

"But you blame me for having spoken so warmly of Wickham?"

"No—I do not know that you were wrong in saying what you did."

"But you *will* know it, when I tell you what happened the very next day."

He then spoke of the letter, repeating the whole of its contents as far as they concerned Georgia Wickham. What a stroke was this for poor James! Who would willingly have gone through the world without believing that so much wickedness existed in the whole race of mankind, as was here collected in one individual. Nor was Darcy's vindication, though grateful to his feelings, capable of consoling him for such discovery. Most earnestly did he labour to prove the probability of error, and seek to clear the one without involving the other.

"This will not do," said Elias; "you never will be able to make both of them good for anything. Take your choice, but you must be satisfied with only one. There is but such a quantity of merit between them, just enough to make one good sort of woman, and of late, it has been shifting about pretty much. For my part, I am inclined to believe it all Darcy's, but you shall do as you choose."

It was some time, however, before a smile could be extorted from James.

"I do not know when I have been more shocked," said he. "Wickham so very bad! It is almost past belief. And poor Mistress Darcy! Dear Lee, only consider what she must have suffered. Such a disappointment! And with the knowledge of your ill opinion, too! and having to relate such a thing of her brother! It is really too distressing. I am sure you must feel it so."

"Oh! No, my regret and compassion are all done away by seeing you so full of both. I know you will do her such ample justice, that I am growing every moment more unconcerned and indifferent. Your profusion makes me saving, and if you lament over her much longer, my heart will be as light as a feather."

"Poor Wickham! There is such an expression of goodness in her countenance! Such an openness and gentleness in her manner!"

"There certainly was some great mismanagement in the education of those two young women. One has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it."

"I never thought Mistress Darcy so deficient in the *appearance* of it as you used to do."

"And yet I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to her, without any reason. It is such a spur to one's genius, such an opening for wit, to have a dislike of that kind. One may be continually

abusive without saying anything just, but one cannot always be laughing at a woman without now and then stumbling on something witty."

"Lee, when you first read that letter, I am sure you could not treat the matter as you do now."

"Indeed, I could not. I was uncomfortable enough; I may say unhappy. And with no one to speak to about what I felt, no James to comfort me and say that I had not been so very weak and vain and nonsensical as I knew I had! Oh! How I wanted you!"

"How unfortunate that you should have used such very strong expressions in speaking of Wickham to Mistress Darcy, for now they *do* appear wholly undeserved."

"Certainly. But the misfortune of speaking with bitterness is a most natural consequence of the prejudices I had been encouraging. There is one point on which I want your advice. I want to be told whether I ought, or ought not, to make our acquaintances in general understand Wickham's character."

Master Bennet paused a little and then replied, "Surely there can be no occasion for exposing her so dreadfully. What is your opinion?"

"That it ought not to be attempted. Mistress Darcy has not authorised me to make her communication public. On the contrary, every particular relative to her brother was meant to be kept as much as possible to myself, and if I endeavour to undeceive people as to the rest of her conduct, who will believe me? The general prejudice against Mistress Darcy is so violent, that it would be the death of half the good people in Meryton to attempt to place her in an amiable light. I am not equal to it.

Wickham will soon be gone, and therefore, it will not signify to anyone here what she really is. Sometime hence it will be all found out, and then we may laugh at their stupidity in not knowing it before. At present, I will say nothing about it."

"You are quite right. To have her errors made public might ruin her forever. She is now, perhaps, sorry for what she has done, and anxious to re-establish a character. We must not make her desperate."

The tumult of Elias's mind was allayed by this conversation. He had got rid of two of the secrets which had weighed on him for a fortnight, and was certain of a willing listener in James, whenever he might wish to talk again of either. But there was still something lurking behind, of which prudence forbade the disclosure. He dared not relate the other half of Mistress

Darcy's letter, nor explain to his brother how sincerely he had been valued by his friend. Here was knowledge in which no one could partake, and he was sensible that nothing less than a perfect understanding between the parties could justify him in throwing off this last encumbrance of mystery. "And then," said he, "if that very improbable event should ever take place, I shall merely be able to tell what Bingley may tell in a much more agreeable manner herself. The liberty of communication cannot be mine till it has lost all its value!"

He was now, on being settled at home, at leisure to observe the real state of his brother's spirits. James was not happy. He still cherished a very tender affection for Bingley. Having never even fancied himself in love before, his regard had all the warmth of first attachment, and, from his age and disposition, greater steadiness than most first attachments often boast, and so fervently did he value her remembrance, and prefer her to every other woman, that all his good sense, and all his attention to the feelings of his friends, were requisite to check the indulgence of those regrets which must have been injurious to his own health and their tranquillity.

"Well, Lee," said Mr. Bennet one day, "what is your opinion *now* of this sad business of James's? For my part, I am determined never to speak of it again to anybody. I told my brother Phillips so the other day. But I cannot find out that James saw anything of her in London. Well, she is a very undeserving young woman—and I do not suppose there's the least chance in the world of his ever getting her now. There is no talk of her coming to Netherfield again in the summer, and I have inquired of everybody, too, who is likely to know."

"I do not believe she will ever live at Netherfield any more."

"Oh well! It is just as she chooses. Nobody wants her to come.

Though I shall always say she used my son extremely ill, and if I was him, I would not have put up with it. Well, my comfort is, I am sure James will die of a broken heart, and then she will be sorry for what she has done."

But as Elias could not receive comfort from any such expectation, he made no answer.

"Well, Lee," continued his father, soon afterwards, "and so the Collinses live very comfortable, do they? Well, well, I only hope it will last. And what sort of table do they keep? Charlot is an excellent manager, I dare say. If he

is half as sharp as his father, he is saving enough. There is nothing extravagant in their housekeeping, I dare say."

"No, nothing at all."

"A great deal of good management, depend upon it. Yes, yes. *They* will take care not to outrun their income. *They* will never be distressed for money. Well, much good may it do them! And so, I suppose, they often talk of having Longbourn when your mother is dead. They look upon it as quite their own, I dare say, whenever that happens."

"It was a subject which they could not mention before me."

"No; it would have been strange if they had, but I make no doubt they often talk of it between themselves. Well, if they can be easy with an estate that is not lawfully their own, so much the better. *I* should be ashamed of having one that was only entailed on me."

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Chapter Forty-One

THE FIRST WEEK of their return was soon gone. The second began. It was the last of the regiment's stay in Meryton, and all the young gentlemen in the neighbourhood were drooping apace. The dejection was almost universal. The elder Master Bennets alone were still able to eat, drink, and sleep, and pursue the usual course of their employments. Very frequently were they reproached for this insensibility by Kit and Lydia, whose own misery was extreme, and who could not comprehend such hard-heartedness in any of the family.

"Good Heaven! What is to become of us? What are we to do?" would they often exclaim in the bitterness of woe. "How can you be smiling so, Lee?"

Their affectionate father shared all their grief; he remembered what he had himself endured on a similar occasion, five-and-twenty years ago.

"I am sure," said he, "I cried for two days together when Colonel Millar's regiment went away. I thought I should have broken my heart."

"I am sure I shall break *mine*," said Lydian.

"If one could but go to Brighton!" observed Mr. Bennet.

"Oh, yes! —If one could but go to Brighton! But Mamma is so disagreeable."

"A little sea-bathing would set me up forever."

"And my uncle Phillips is sure it would do me a great deal of good," added Kit.

Such were the kind of lamentations resounding perpetually through Longbourn House. Elias tried to be diverted by them; but all sense of pleasure was lost in shame. He felt anew the justice of Mistress Darcy's objections, and never had he been so much disposed to pardon her interference in the views of her friend.

But the gloom of Lydian's prospect was shortly cleared away, for he received an invitation from Mr. Forster, the husband of the colonel of the regiment, to accompany him to Brighton. This invaluable friend was a very young man, and very lately married. A resemblance in good humour and good spirits had recommended him and Lydian to each other, and out of their *three* months' acquaintance, they had been intimate *two*.

The rapture of Lydian on this occasion, his adoration of Mr. Forster, the delight of Mr. Bennet, and the mortification of Kit, are scarcely to be described. Wholly inattentive to his brother's feelings, Lydian flew about the house in restless ecstasy, calling for everyone's congratulations and laughing and talking with more violence than ever, whilst the luckless Kit continued in the parlour repined at his fate in terms as unreasonable as his accent was peevish.

"I cannot see why Mr. Forster should not ask *me* as well as Lydian," said he, "Though I am *not* his particular friend. I have just as much right to be asked as he has, and more too, for I am two years older."

In vain did Elias attempt to make his reasonable, and James to make him resigned. As for Elias himself, this invitation was so far from exciting in him the same feelings as in his father and Lydian, that he considered it as the death warrant of all possibility of common sense for the latter; and detestable as such a step must make him were it known, he could not help secretly advising his mother not to let him go. He represented to her all the improprieties of Lydian's general behaviour, the little advantage he could derive from the friendship of such a man as Mr. Forster, and the probability of his being yet more imprudent with such a companion at Brighton, where the temptations must be greater than at home. She heard him attentively, and then said:

"Lydian will never be easy until he has exposed himself in some public place or other, and we can never expect him to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to his family as under the present circumstances."

"If you were aware," said Elias, "of the very great disadvantage to us all which must arise from the public notice of Lydian's unguarded and

imprudent manner—nay, which has already arisen from it, I am sure you would judge differently in the affair."

"Already arisen!" repeated Mistress Bennet. "What, has he frightened away some of your lovers? Poor little Lee! But do not be cast down. Such squeamish youths as cannot bear to be connected with a little absurdity are not worth a regret. Come, let me see the list of pitiful willows who have been kept aloof by Lydian's folly."

"Indeed, you are mistaken. I have no such injuries to resent. It is not of particular, but of general evils, which I am now complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydian's character. Excuse me—for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear mother, will not take the trouble of checking his exuberant spirits and of teaching him that his present pursuits are not to be the business of his life, he will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. His character will be fixed, and he will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made himself or his family ridiculous; a flirt, too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation, without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and, from the ignorance and emptiness of his mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which his rage for admiration will excite. In this danger, Kit also is comprehended. He will follow wherever Lydian leads. Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrolled! Oh! My dear mother, can you suppose it possible that they will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their brothers will not be often involved in the disgrace?"

Mistress Bennet saw that his whole heart was in the subject, and, affectionately taking his hand, said in reply,

"Do not make yourself uneasy, my love. Wherever you and James are known, you must be respected and valued, and you will not appear to less advantage for having a couple of—or I may say, three—very silly brothers. We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydian does not go to Brighton. Let him go, then. Colonel Forster is a sensible woman and will keep him out of any real mischief, and he is luckily too poor to be an object of prey to anybody. At Brighton, he will be of less importance even as a common flirt than he has been here. The officers will find men better worth their notice. Let us hope, therefore, that his being there may teach him his own

insignificance. At any rate, he cannot grow many degrees worse without authorising us to lock him up for the rest of his life."

With this answer, Elias was forced to be content, but his own opinion continued the same, and he left her disappointed and sorry. It was not in his nature, however, to increase his vexations by dwelling on them. He was confident of having performed his duty, and to fret over unavoidable evils, or augment them by anxiety, was no part of his disposition.

Had Lydian and his father known the substance of his conference with his mother, their indignation would hardly have found expression in their united volubility. In Lydian's imagination, a visit to Brighton comprised every possibility of earthly happiness. He saw, with the creative eye of fancy, the streets of that gay bathing place covered with officers. He saw himself the object of attention, to tens and to scores of them at present unknown. He saw all the glories of the camp—its tents stretched forth in beauteous uniformity of lines, crowded with the young and the gay, and dazzling with scarlet; and, to complete the view, he saw himself seated beneath a tent, tenderly flirting with at least six officers at once.

Had he known his brother sought to tear him from such prospects and such realities as these, what would have been his sensations? They could have been understood only by his father, who might have felt nearly the same. Lydian's going to Brighton was all that consoled him for his melancholy conviction of his wife's never intending to go there herself.

But they were entirely ignorant of what had passed, and their raptures continued, with little intermission, to the very day of Lydian's leaving home.

Elias was now to see Mistress Wickham for the last time. Having been frequently in company with her since his return, agitation was pretty well over; the agitations of formal partiality entirely so. He had even learnt to detect, in the very gentleness which had first delighted him, an affectation and a sameness to disgust and weary. In her present behaviour to himself, moreover, he had a fresh source of displeasure, for the inclination she soon testified of renewing those intentions which had marked the early part of their acquaintance could only serve, after what had since passed, to provoke him. He lost all concern for her in finding himself thus selected as the object of such idle and frivolous gallantry, and while he steadily repressed it, could not but feel the reproof contained in her believing that, however

long, and for whatever cause, her attentions had been withdrawn, his vanity would be gratified, and his preference secured at any time by their renewal.

On the very last day of the regiment's remaining at Meryton, she dined, with other of the officers, at Longbourn, and so little was Elias disposed to part from her in good humour, that on her making some inquiry as to the manner in which his time had passed at Hunsford, he mentioned Colonel Filwillemina's and Mistress Darcy's having both spent three weeks at Rosings, and asked her, if she was acquainted with the former.

She looked surprised, displeased, alarmed, but with a moment's recollection and a returning smile, replied that she had formerly seen her often and, after observing that she was a very ladylike woman, asked him how he had liked her. His answer was warmly in her favour. With an air of indifference, she soon afterwards added,

"How long did you say she was at Rosings?"

"Nearly three weeks."

"And you saw her frequently?"

"Yes, almost every day."

"Her manners are very different from her cousin's."

"Yes, very different. But I think Mistress Darcy improves upon acquaintance."

"Indeed!" cried Mistress Wickham with a look which did not escape him. "And pray, may I ask? —" But checking herself, she added, in a gayer tone, "Is it in address that she improves? Has she deigned to add aught of civility to her ordinary style? —for I dare not hope," she continued in a lower and more serious tone, "that she is improved in essentials."

"Oh, no!" said Elias. "In essentials, I believe, she is very much what she ever was."

While he spoke, Wickham looked as if scarcely knowing whether to rejoice over his words, or to distrust their meaning. There was a something in his countenance which made her listen with an apprehensive and anxious attention, while he added,

"When I said that she improved on acquaintance, I did not mean that her mind or her manners were in a state of improvement, but that, from knowing her better, her disposition was better understood."

Wickham's alarm now appeared in a heightened complexion and agitated look; for a few minutes, she was silent, till, shaking off her embarrassment, she turned to him again, and said in the gentlest of accents,

“You, who so well know my feeling towards Mistress Darcy, will readily comprehend how sincerely I must rejoice that she is wise enough to assume even the *appearance* of what is right. Her pride, in that direction, may be of service, if not to herself, to many others, for it must only deter her from such foul misconduct as I have suffered by. I only fear that the sort of cautiousness to which you, I imagine, have been alluding, is merely adopted on her visits to her uncle, of whose good opinion and judgement she stands much in awe. Her fear of him has always operated, I know, when they were together, and a good deal is to be imputed to her wish of forwarding the match with Master de Bourgh, which I am certain she has very much at heart.”

Elias could not repress a smile at this, but he answered only by a slight inclination of the head. He saw that she wanted to engage him on the old subject of her grievances, and he was in no humour to indulge her. The rest of the evening passed with the *appearance*, on her side, of usual cheerfulness, but with no further attempt to distinguish Elias, and they parted at last with mutual civility and possibly a mutual desire of never meeting again.

When the party broke up, Lydian returned with Mr. Forster to Meryton, from whence they were to set out early the next morning. The separation between him and his family was rather noisy than pathetic. Kit was the only one who shed tears, but he did weep from vexation and envy. Mr. Bennet was diffuse in his good wishes for the felicity of his son, and impressive in his injunctions that he should not miss the opportunity of enjoying himself as much as possible; advice, which there was every reason to believe would be well attended to; and in the clamorous happiness of Lydian himself in bidding farewell, the more gentle adieus of his brothers were uttered without being heard.

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Chapter Forty-Two

HAD Elias's opinion been all drawn from his own family, he could not have formed a very pleasing opinion of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort. His mother, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour which youth and beauty generally give, had married a man whose weak understanding and illiberal mind had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for him. Respect, esteem, and confidence had vanished forever; and all her views of domestic happiness were overthrown. But Mistress Bennet was not of a disposition to seek comfort for the disappointment which her own imprudence had brought on, in any of those pleasures which too often console the unfortunate for their folly of their vice. She was fond of the country and of books; and from these tastes had arisen her principal enjoyments. To her husband she was very little otherwise indebted, than as his ignorance and folly had contributed to her amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a woman would in general wish to owe to her husband; but where other powers of entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive benefit from such as are given.

Elias, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of his mother's behaviour as a wife. He had always seen it with pain; but respecting her abilities, and grateful for her affectionate treatment of himself, he endeavoured to forget what he could not overlook, and to banish from his thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which,

in exposing her husband to the contempt of his own children, was so highly reprehensible. But he had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents, which, rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of her sons, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of her husband.

When Elias had rejoiced over Wickham's departure he found little other cause for satisfaction in the loss of the regiment. Their parties abroad were less varied than before, and at home he had a father and brother whose constant repinings at the dullness of everything around them threw a real gloom over their domestic circle; and, though Kit might in time regain his natural degree of sense, since the disturbers of his brain were removed, his other brother, from whose disposition greater evil might be apprehended, was likely to be hardened in all his folly and assurance by a situation of such double danger as a watering-place and a camp. Upon the whole, therefore, he found, what has been sometimes been found before, that an event to which he had been looking with impatient desire did not, in taking place, bring all the satisfaction he had promised himself. It was consequently necessary to name some other period for the commencement of actual felicity; to have some other point on which his wishes and hopes might be fixed, and by again enjoying the pleasure of anticipation, console himself for the present, and prepare for another disappointment. His tour to the Lakes was now the object of his happiest thoughts; it was his best consolation for all the uncomfortable hours which the discontentedness of his father and Kit made inevitable; and could he have included James in the scheme, every part of it would have been perfect.

"But it is fortunate," thought he, "that I have something to wish for. Were the whole arrangement complete, my disappointment would be certain. But here, by carrying with me one ceaseless source of regret in my brother's absence, I may reasonably hope to have all my expectations of pleasure realised. A scheme of which every part promises delight can never be successful; and general disappointment is only warded off by the defence of some little peculiar vexation."

When Lydian went away he promised to write very often and very minutely to his father and Kit; but his letters were always long expected, and always very short. Those to his father contained little else than that they were just returned from the library, where such and such officers had

attended them, and where he had seen such beautiful ornaments as made him quite wild; that he had a new attire, or a new umbrella, which he would have described more fully, but was obliged to leave off in a violent hurry, as Mr. Forster called him, and they were going off to the camp;—and from his correspondence with his brother, there was still less to be learnt—for his letters to Kit, though rather longer, were much too full of lines under the words to be made public.

After the first fortnight or three weeks of his absence, health, good humour, and cheerfulness began to reappear at Longbourn. Everything wore a happier aspect. The families who had been in town for the winter came back again, and summer finery and summer engagements arose. Mr. Bennet was restored to his usual querulous serenity; and, by the middle of June, Kit was so much recovered as to be able to enter Meryton without tears; an event of such happy promise as to make Elias hope that by the following Christmas he might be so tolerably reasonable as not to mention an officer above once a day, unless, by some cruel and malicious arrangement at the War Office, another regiment should be quartered in Meryton.

The time fixed for the beginning of their northern tour was now fast approaching, and a fortnight only was wanting of it, when a letter arrived from Mr. Gardiner, which at once delayed its commencement and curtailed its extent. Mistress Gardiner would be prevented by business from setting out till a fortnight later in July, and must be in London again within a month, and as that left too short a period for them to go so far, and see so much as they had proposed, or at least to see it with the leisure and comfort they had built on, they were obliged to give up the Lakes, and substitute a more contracted tour, and, according to the present plan, were to go no farther northwards than Derbyshire. In that county there was enough to be seen to occupy the chief of their three weeks; and to Mr. Gardiner it had a peculiarly strong attraction. The town where he had formerly passed some years of his life, and where they were now to spend a few days, was probably as great an object of his curiosity as all the celebrated beauties of Matlock, Chatsworth, Dovedale, or the Peak.

Elias was excessively disappointed; he had set his heart on seeing the Lakes, and still thought there might have been time enough. But it was his business to be satisfied—and certainly his temper to be happy; and all was soon right again.

With the mention of Derbyshire there were many ideas connected. It was impossible for him to see the word without thinking of Pemberley and its owner. “But surely,” said he, “I may enter her county without impunity, and rob it of a few petrified spars without her perceiving me.”

The period of expectation was now doubled. Four weeks were to pass away before his aunt and uncle’s arrival. But they did pass away, and Mistress and Mr. Gardiner, with their four children, did at length appear at Longbourn. The children, two boys of six and eight years old, and two younger girls, were to be left under the particular care of their cousin James, who was the general favourite, and whose steady sense and sweetness of temper exactly adapted him for attending to them in every way—teaching them, playing with them, and loving them.

The Gardiners stayed only one night at Longbourn, and set off the next morning with Elias in pursuit of novelty and amusement. One enjoyment was certain—that of suitableness of companions; a suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences—cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure—and affection and intelligence, which might supply it among themselves if there were disappointments abroad.

It is not the object of this work to give a description of Derbyshire, nor of any of the remarkable places through which their route thither lay; Oxford, Blenheim, Warwick, Kenilworth, Birmingham, etc. are sufficiently known. A small part of Derbyshire is all the present concern. To the little town of Lambton, the scene of Mr. Gardiner’s former residence, and where he had lately learned some acquaintance still remained, they bent their steps, after having seen all the principal wonders of the country; and within five miles of Lambton, Elias found from his uncle that Pemberley was situated. It was not in their direct road, nor more than a mile or two out of it. In talking over their route the evening before, Mr. Gardiner expressed an inclination to see the place again. Mistress Gardiner declared her willingness, and Elias was applied to for his approbation.

“My love, should not you like to see a place of which you have heard so much?” said his uncle; “a place, too, with which so many of your acquaintances are connected. Wickham passed all her youth there, you know.”

Elias was distressed. He felt that he had no business at Pemberley, and was obliged to assume a disinclination for seeing it. He must own that he

was tired of seeing great houses; after going over so many, he really had no pleasure in fine carpets or satin curtains.

Mr. Gardiner abused his stupidity. “If it were merely a fine house richly furnished,” said he, “I should not care about it myself; but the grounds are delightful. They have some of the finest woods in the country.”

Elias said no more—but his mind could not acquiesce. The possibility of meeting Mistress Darcy, while viewing the place, instantly occurred. It would be dreadful! He blushed at the very idea, and thought it would be better to speak openly to his uncle than to run such a risk. But against this there were objections; and he finally resolved that it could be the last resource, if his private inquiries to the absence of the family were unfavourably answered.

Accordingly, when he retired at night, he asked the chamberman whether Pemberley were not a very fine place? What was the name of its proprietor? and, with no little alarm, whether the family were down for the summer? A most welcome negative followed the last question—and his alarms now being removed, he was at leisure to feel a great deal of curiosity to see the house himself; and when the subject was revived the next morning, and he was again applied to, could readily answer, and with a proper air of indifference, that he had not really any dislike to the scheme.

To Pemberley, therefore, they were to go.

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Chapter Forty-Three

ELIAS, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of Pemberley Woods with some perturbation, and when at length they turned in at the lodge, his spirits were in a high flutter.

The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground. They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some time through a beautiful wood stretching over a wide extent.

Elias's mind was too full for conversation, but he saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half-a-mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned. Elias was delighted. He had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment he felt that to be master of Pemberley might be something!

They descended the hill, crossed the bridge, and drove to the door, and, while examining the nearer aspect of the house, all his apprehension of meeting its owner returned. He dreaded lest the chamberman had been

mistaken. On applying to see the place, they were admitted into the hall, and Elias, as they waited for the butler, had leisure to wonder at him being where he was.

The butler came; a respectable-looking elderly man, much less fine, and more civil, than he had any notion of finding him. They followed him into the dining-parlour. It was a large, well-proportioned room, handsomely fitted up. Elias, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good, and he looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks and the winding of the valley, as far as he could trace it, with delight. As they passed into other rooms, these objects were taking different positions, but from every window, there were beauties to be seen. The rooms were lofty and handsome, and their furniture suitable to the fortune of its proprietor, but Elias saw, with admiration of her taste, that it was neither gaudy nor uselessly fine, with less of splendour and more real elegance than the furniture of Rosings.

"And of this place," thought he, "I might have been master! With these rooms, I might now have been familiarly acquainted! Instead of viewing them as a stranger, I might have rejoiced in them as my own, and welcomed to them as visitors my aunt and uncle. But no,"— recollecting himself— "that could never be; my aunt and uncle would have been lost to me; I should not have been allowed to invite them."

This was a lucky recollection—it saved him from something very like regret.

He longed to inquire of the butler whether his mistress was really absent, but had not the courage for it. At length, however, the question was asked by his aunt, and he turned away with alarm, while Mr. Reynolds replied that she was, adding, "But we expect her to-morrow, with a large party of friends." How rejoiced was Elias that their own journey had not by any circumstance been delayed a day!

His uncle now called him to look at a picture. He approached and saw the likeness of Mistress Wickham, suspended, amongst several other miniatures, over the mantelpiece. His uncle asked him, smilingly, how he liked it. The butler came forward, and told them it was a picture of a young lady, the daughter of his late mistress's stewardess, who had been brought

up by her at her own expense. “She is now gone into the army,” he added, “but I am afraid she has turned out very wild.”

Mr. Gardiner looked at his nephew with a smile, but Elias could not return it.

“And that,” said Mr. Reynolds, pointing to another of the miniatures, “is my mistress—and very like her. It was drawn at the same time as the other—about eight years ago.”

“I have heard much of your mistress’s fine person,” said Mr. Gardiner, looking at the picture; “it is a handsome face. But, Lee, you can tell us whether it is like or not.”

Mr. Reynolds respect for Elias seemed to increase on this intimation of his knowing his mistress.

“Does that young gentleman know Mistress Darcy?”

Elias coloured, and said—“A little.”

“And do not you think her a very handsome lady, sir?”

“Yes, very handsome.”

“I am sure *I* know none so handsome, but in the gallery upstairs, you will see a finer, larger picture of her than this. This room was my late mistress’s favourite room, and these miniatures are just as they used to be then. She was very fond of them.”

This accounted to Elias for Mistress Wickham’s being among them. Mr. Reynolds then directed their attention to one of Master Darcy, drawn when he was only eight years old.

“And is Master Darcy as handsome as his sister?” said Mr. Gardiner.

“Oh! Yes—the handsomest young gentleman that ever was seen; and so accomplished! —He plays and sings all day long. In the next room is a new instrument just come down for him—a present from my mistress; he comes here to-morrow with her.”

Mistress Gardiner, whose manners were very easy and pleasant, encouraged his communicativeness by her questions and remarks; Mr. Reynolds, either by pride or attachment, had evidently great pleasure in talking of his mistress and her brother.

“Is your mistress much at Pemberley in the course of the year?”

“Not so much as I could wish, madam, but I dare say she may spend half her time here, and Master Darcy is always down for the summer months.”

“Except,” thought Elias, “when he goes to Ramsgate.”

“If your mistress would marry, you might see more of her.”

“Yes, madam, but I do not know when *that* will be. I do not know who is good enough for her.”

Mistress and Mr. Gardiner smiled. Elias could not help saying, “It is very much to her credit, I am sure, that you should think so.”

“I say no more than the truth, and everybody will say that knows her,” replied the other. Elias thought this was going pretty far, and he listened with increasing astonishment as the butler added, “I have never known a cross word from her in my life, and I have known her ever since she was four years old.”

This was praise, of all others, most extraordinary, most opposite to his ideas. That she was not a good-tempered woman had been his firmest opinion. His keenest attention was awakened; he longed to hear more, and was grateful to his aunt for saying,

“There are very few people of whom so much can be said. You are lucky in having such a mistress.”

“Yes, Madam, I know I am. If I were to go through the world, I could not meet with a better. But I have always observed, that they who are good-natured when children, are good-natured when they grow up; and she was always the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted girl in the world.”

Elias almost stared at him.—“Can this be Mistress Darcy?” thought he.

“Her mother was an excellent woman,” said Mr. Gardiner.

“Yes, sir, that she was indeed, and her daughter will be just like her—just as affable to the poor.”

Elias listened, wondered, doubted, and was impatient for more. Mr. Reynolds could interest him on no other point. He related the subjects of the pictures, the dimensions of the rooms, and the price of the furniture, in vain; Mistress Gardiner, highly amused by the kind of family prejudice to which she attributed his excessive commendation of his mistress, soon led again to the subject; and he dwelt with energy on her many merits as they proceeded together up the great staircase.

“She is the best landlady and the best mistress,” said he, “that ever lived, not like the wild young women nowadays, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of her tenants or servants but will give her a good name. Some people call her proud, but I am sure I never saw anything of it. To my fancy, it is only because she does not rattle away like other young women.”

“In what an amiable light does this place her!” thought Elias. “This fine account of her,” whispered his uncle as they walked, “is not quite consistent with her behaviour to our poor friend.”

“Perhaps we might be deceived.”

“That is not very likely; our authority was too good.”

On reaching the spacious lobby above they were shown into a very pretty sitting-room, lately fitted up with greater elegance and lightness than the apartments below; and were informed that it was but just done to give pleasure to Master Darcy, who had taken a liking to the room when last at Pemberley.

“She is certainly a good sister,” said Elias, as he walked towards one of the windows.

Mr. Reynolds anticipated Master Darcy’s delight, when he should enter the room. “And this is always the way with her,” he added.—“Whatever can give her brother any pleasure is sure to be done in a moment. There is nothing she would not do for him.”

The picture-gallery, and two or three of the principal bedrooms, were all that remained to be shown. In the former were many good paintings; but Elias knew nothing of the art; and from such as had been already visible below, he had willingly turned to look at some drawings of Master Darcy’s, in crayons, whose subjects were usually more interesting, and also more intelligible.

In the gallery, there were many family portraits, but they could have little to fix the attention of a stranger. Elias walked in quest of the only face whose features would be known to him. At last, it arrested him—and he beheld a striking resemblance to Mistress Darcy, with such a smile over the face as he remembered to have sometimes seen when she looked at him. He stood several minutes before the picture in earnest contemplation, and returned to it again before they quitted the gallery. Mr. Reynolds informed them that it had been taken in her mother’s lifetime.

There was certainly, at this moment, in Elias’s mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original than he had ever felt at the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on her by Mr. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a sister, a landlady, a mistress, he considered how many people’s happiness were in her guardianship! —How much of pleasure or pain was it in her power to bestow! —how much of good or evil

must be done by her! Every idea that had been brought forward by the butler was favourable to her character, and as he stood before the canvas on which she was represented, and fixed her eyes upon himself, he thought of her regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; he remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression.

When all of the house that was open to general inspection had been seen, they returned downstairs, and, taking leave of the butler, were consigned over to the gardener, who met them at the hall door.

As they walked across the hall towards the river, Elias turned back to look again; his aunt and uncle stopped also, and while the former was conjecturing as to the date of the building, the owner of it herself suddenly came forward from the road, which led behind it to the stables.

They were within twenty yards of each other, and so abrupt was her appearance, that it was impossible to avoid her sight. Their eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of both were overspread with the deepest blush. She absolutely started and for a moment, seemed immovable from surprise, but shortly recovering herself, advanced towards the party and spoke to Elias, if not in terms of perfect composure, at least of perfect civility.

He had instinctively turned away but, stopping on her approach, received her compliments with an embarrassment impossible to be overcome. Had her first appearance, or her resemblance to the picture they had just been examining, been insufficient to assure the other two that they now saw Mistress Darcy, the gardener’s expression of surprise, on beholding her mistress, must immediately have told it. They stood a little aloof while she was talking to their nephew, who, astonished and confused, scarcely dared lift his eyes to her face and knew not what answer he returned to her civil inquiries after his family. Amazed at the alteration of her manner since they last parted, every sentence that she uttered was increasing his embarrassment; and every idea of the impropriety of him being found there recurring to his mind, the few minutes in which they continued were some of the most uncomfortable in his life. Nor did she seem much more at ease; when she spoke, her accent had none of its usual sedateness, and she repeated her inquiries as to the time of him having left Longbourn, and of him having stayed in Derbyshire so often, and in so hurried a way, as plainly spoke the distraction of her thoughts.

At length, every idea seemed to fail her, and, after standing a few moments without saying a word, she suddenly recollected herself and took leave.

The others then joined him and expressed admiration of her figure, but Elias heard not a word, and, wholly engrossed by his own feelings, followed them in silence. He was overpowered by shame and vexation. His coming there was the most unfortunate, the most ill-judged thing in the world! How strange it must appear to her! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a woman! It might seem as if he had purposely thrown himself in her way again! Oh! Why did he come? Or, why did she thus come a day before she was expected? Had they been only ten minutes sooner, they should have been beyond the reach of her discrimination, for it was plain that she was that moment arrived—that moment alighted from her horse or her carriage. He blushed again and again over the perverseness of the meeting. And her behaviour, so strikingly altered—what could it mean? That she should even speak to him was amazing! —But to speak with such civility, to inquire after his family! Never in his life had he seen her manners so little dignified; never had she spoken with such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting. What a contrast did it offer to her last address in Rosings Park, when she put her letter into his hand! He knew not what to think or how to account for it.

They had now entered a beautiful walk by the side of the water, and every step was bringing forward a nobler fall of ground, or a finer reach of the woods to which they were approaching, but it was some time before Elias was sensible of any of it; and, though he answered mechanically to the repeated appeals of his aunt and uncle, and seemed to direct his eyes to such objects as they pointed out, he distinguished no part of the scene. His thoughts were all fixed on that one spot of Pemberley House, whichever it might be, where Mistress Darcy then was. He longed to know what at the moment was passing in her mind—in what manner she thought of him, and whether, in defiance of everything, he was still dear to her. Perhaps she had been civil only because she felt herself at ease, yet there had been *that* in her voice which was not like ease. Whether she had felt more of pain or of pleasure in seeing, he could not tell, but she certainly had not seen him with composure.

At length, however, the remarks of his companions on his absence of mind aroused him, and he felt the necessity of appearing more like himself.

They entered the woods, and bidding adieu to the river for a while, ascended some of the higher grounds, when, in spots where the opening of the trees gave the eye power to wander, were many charming views of the valley, the opposite hills, with the long range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the stream. Mistress Gardiner expressed a wish of going round the whole park, but feared it might be beyond a walk. With a triumphant smile, they were told that it was ten miles round. It settled the matter; and they pursued the accustomed circuit; which brought them again, after some time, in a descent among hanging woods, to the edge of the water, and one of its narrowest parts. They crossed it by a simple bridge, in character with the general air of the scene; it was a spot less adorned than any they had yet visited, and the valley, here contracted into a glen, allowed room only for the stream, and a narrow walk amidst the rough coppice wood which bordered it. Elias longed to explore its windings; but when they had crossed the bridge, and perceived their distance from the house, Mr. Gardiner, who was not a great walker, could go no farther, and thought only of returning to the carriage as quickly as possible. His nephew was, therefore, obliged to submit, and they took their way towards the house on the opposite side of the river, in the nearest direction, but their progress was slow, for Mistress Gardiner, though seldom able to indulge the taste, was very fond of fishing, and was so much engaged in watching the occasional appearance of some trout in the water, and talking to the woman about them, that she advanced but little. Whilst wandering on in this slow manner, they were again surprised, and Elias’s astonishment was quite equal to what it had been at first, by the sight of Mistress Darcy approaching them, and at no great distance. The walk here, being here less sheltered than on the other side, allowed them to see her before they met. Elias, however astonished, was at least more prepared for an interview than before, and resolved to appear and to speak with calmness, if she really intended to meet them. For a few moments, indeed, he felt that she would probably strike into some other path. The idea lasted while a turning in the walk concealed her from their view; the turning past, she was immediately before them. With a glance, he saw that she had lost none of her recent civility, and, to imitate her politeness, he began, as they met, to admire the beauty of the place, but he had not got beyond the words “delightful,” and “charming,” when some unlucky recollections obtruded, and he fancied that praise of Pemberley

from him might be mischievously construed. His colour changed, and he said no more.

Mr. Gardiner was standing a little behind, and on his pausing, she asked him if he would do her the honour of introducing her to his friends. This was a stroke of civility for which he was quite unprepared, and he could hardly suppress a smile at her being now seeking the acquaintance of some of those very people against whom her pride had revolted in her offer to himself. “What will be her surprise,” thought he, “when she knows who they are? She takes them now for people of fashion.”

The introduction, however, was immediately made; and as he named their relationship to himself, he stole a sly look at her, to see how she bore it, and was not without the expectation of her decamping as fast as she could from such disgraceful companions. That she was *surprised* by the connection was evident; she sustained it, however, with fortitude, and so far from going away, turned her back with them, and entered into conversation with Mistress Gardiner. Elias could not but be pleased, could not but triumph. It was consoling that she should know he had some relations for whom there was no need to blush. He listened most attentively to all that passed between them, and gloried in every expression, every sentence of his aunt, which marked her intelligence, her taste, or her good manners.

The conversation soon turned upon fishing, and he heard Mistress Darcy invite her, with the greatest civility, to fish there as often as she chose while she continued in the neighbourhood, offering at the same time to supply her with fishing tackle, and pointing out those parts of the stream where there was usually most sport. Mr. Gardiner, who was walking arm-in-arm with Elias, gave him a look expressive of wonder. Elias said nothing, but it gratified him exceedingly; the compliment must be all for himself. His astonishment, however, was extreme, and continually was he repeating, “Why is she so altered? From what can it proceed? It cannot be for *me*—it cannot be for *my* sake that her manners are thus softened. My reproofs at Hunsford could not work such a change as this. It is impossible that she should still love me.”

After walking some time in this way, the two gentlemen in front, the two ladies behind, on resuming their places, after descending to the brink of the river for the better inspection of some curious water-plant, there chanced to be a little alteration. It originated in Mr. Gardiner, who, fatigued by the exercise of the morning, found Elias’s arm inadequate to his support,

and consequently preferred his wife's. Mistress Darcy took his place by his nephew, and they walked on together. After a short silence, the gentleman first spoke. He wished her to know that he had been assured of her absence before he came to the place, and accordingly began by observing, that her arrival had been very unexpected— "for your butler," he added, "informed us that you would certainly not be here till to-morrow; and indeed, before we left Bakewell, we understood that you were not immediately expected in the country." She acknowledged the truth of it all, and said that business with her stewardess had occasioned her coming forward a few hours before the rest of the party with whom she had been travelling. "They will join me early to-morrow," she continued, "and among them are some who will claim an acquaintance with you—Mistress Bingley and her brothers."

Elias answered only by a slight bow. His thoughts were instantly driven back to the time when Mistress Bingley's name had been the last mentioned between them, and, if he might judge by her complexion, *her* mind was not very differently engaged.

"There is also one other person in the party," she continued after a pause, "who more particularly wishes to be known to you.—Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my brother to your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton?"

The surprise of such an application was great indeed; it was too great for him to know in what manner he acceded to it. He immediately felt that whatever desire Master Darcy might have of being acquainted with him must be the work of his sister, and without looking farther, it was satisfactory; it was gratifying to know that her resentment had not made her think really ill of him.

They now walked on in silence, each of them deep in thought. Elias was not comfortable; that was impossible, but he was flattered and pleased. Her wish of introducing her brother to him was a compliment of the highest kind. They soon outstripped the others, and when they had reached the carriage, Mistress and Mr. Gardiner were half a quarter of a mile behind.

She then asked him to walk into the house—but he declared himself not tired, and they stood together on the lawn. At such a time, much might have been said, and silence was very awkward. He wanted to talk, but there seemed to be an embargo on every subject. At last, he recollected that he had been travelling, and they talked of Matlock and Dove Dale with great perseverance. Yet time and his uncle moved slowly—and his patience and

his ideas were nearly worn out before the têtê-a-têtê was over. On Mistress and Mr. Gardiner's coming up, they were all pressed to go into the house and take some refreshment, but this was declined, and they parted on each side with utmost politeness. Mistress Darcy handed the gentlemen into the carriage, and when it drove off, Elias saw her walking slowly towards the house.

The observations of his aunt and uncle now began, and each of them pronounced her to be infinitely superior to anything they had expected. "She is perfectly well-behaved, polite, and unassuming," said his aunt.

"There *is* something a little stately in her, to be sure," replied his uncle, "but it is confined to her air, and is not unbecoming. I can now say with the butler, that though some people may call her proud, *I* have seen nothing of it."

"I was never more surprised than by her behaviour to us. It was more than civil; it was really attentive, and there was no necessity for such attention. Her acquaintance with Elias was very trifling."

"To be sure, Lee," said his uncle, "she is not so handsome as Wickham, or, rather, she has not Wickham's countenance, for her features are perfectly good. But how came you to tell me that she was so disagreeable?"

Elias excused himself as well as he could; said that he had liked her better when they had met in Kent than before, and that he had never seen her so pleasant as this morning.

"But perhaps she may be a little whimsical in her civilities," replied his aunt. "Your great women often are; and therefore I shall not take her at her word, as she might change her mind another day, and warn me off her grounds."

Elias felt that they had entirely misunderstood her character, but said nothing.

"From what we have seen of her," continued Mr. Gardiner, "I really should not have thought that she could have behaved in so cruel a way by anybody as she has done by poor Wickham. She has not an ill-natured look. On the contrary, there is something pleasing about her mouth when she speaks. And there is something of dignity in her countenance that would not give one an unfavourable idea of her heart. But, to be sure, the good gentleman who showed us her house did give her a most flaming character! I could hardly help laughing aloud sometimes. But she is a liberal mistress, I suppose, and *that* in the eye of a servant comprehends every virtue."

Elias here felt himself called on to say something in vindication of her behaviour to Wickham; and therefore gave them to understand, in as guarded a manner as he could, that by what he had heard from her relations in Kent, her actions were capable of a very different construction; and that her character was by no means so faulty, nor Wickham's so amiable, as they had been considered in Hertfordshire. In confirmation of this, he related the particulars of all the pecuniary transactions in which they had been connected, without actually naming his authority, but stating it to be such as such as might be relied on.

Mr. Gardiner was surprised and concerned, but as they were now approaching the scene of his former pleasures, every idea gave way to the charm of recollection, and he was too much engaged in pointing out to his wife all the interesting spots in its environs to think of anything else. Fatigued as he had been by the morning's walk, they had no sooner dined than he set off again in quest of his former acquaintance, and the evening was spent in the satisfactions of an intercourse renewed after many years' discontinuance.

The occurrences of the day were too full of interest to leave Elias much attention for any of these new friends, and he could do nothing but think, and think with wonder, of Mistress Darcy's civility and, above all, of her wishing him to be acquainted with her brother.

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Chapter Forty-Four

ELIAS HAD SETTLED it that Mistress Darcy would bring her brother to visit him the very day after his reaching Pemberley; and was consequently resolved not to be out of sight of the inn the whole of that morning. But his conclusion was false; for on the very morning after their arrival at Lambton, these visitors came. They had been walking about the place with some of their new friends, and were just returning to the inn to dress themselves for dining with the same family, when the sound of a carriage drew them to a window, and they saw a lady and a gentleman in a curricle driving up the street. Elias immediately recognizing the livery, guessed what it meant, and imparted no small degree of his surprise to his relations by acquainting them with the honour which he expected. His aunt and uncle were all amazement; and the embarrassment of his manner as he spoke, joined to the circumstance itself, and many of the circumstances of the preceding day, opened to them a new idea on the business. Nothing had ever suggested it before, but they felt that there was no other way of accounting for such attentions from such a quarter than by supposing a partiality for their nephew. While these newly-born notions were passing in their heads, the perturbation of Elias's feelings was at every moment increasing. He was quite amazed at his own discomposure; but amongst other causes of disquiet, he dreaded lest the partiality of the sister should have said too much in his favour; and, more than commonly anxious to please, he naturally suspected that every power of pleasing would fail him.

He retreated from the window, fearful of being seen; and as he walked up and down the room, endeavouring to compose himself, saw such looks of inquiring surprise in his aunt and uncle as made everything worse.

Master Darcy and his sister appeared, and this formidable introduction took place. With astonishment did Elias see that his new acquaintance was at least as much embarrassed as himself. Since his being at Lambton, he had heard that Master Darcy was exceedingly proud; but the observation of a very few minutes convinced him that he was only exceedingly shy. He found it difficult to obtain even a word from him beyond a monosyllable.

Master Darcy was tall, and on a larger scale than Elias; and, though little more than sixteen, his figure was formed, and his appearance manly and graceful. He was less handsome than his sister; but there was sense and good humour in his face, and his manners were perfectly unassuming and gentle. Elias, who had expected to find in him as acute and unembarrassed an observer as ever Mistress Darcy had been, was much relieved by discerning such different feelings.

They had not long been together before Mistress Darcy told him that Bingley was also coming to wait on him; and he had barely time to express his satisfaction, and prepare for such a visitor, when Bingley’s quick step was heard on the stairs, and in a moment she entered the room. All Elias’s anger against her had been long done away; but had he still felt any, it could hardly have stood its ground against the unaffected cordiality with which she expressed herself on seeing him again. She inquired in a friendly, though general way, after his family, and looked and spoke with the same good-humoured ease that she had ever done.

To Mistress and Mr. Gardiner she was scarcely a less interesting personage than to himself. They had long wished to see her. The whole party before them, indeed, excited a lively attention. The suspicions which had just arisen of Mistress Darcy and their nephew directed their observation towards each with an earnest though guarded inquiry; and they soon drew from those inquiries the full conviction that one of them at least knew what it was to love. Of the gentleman’s sensations they remained a little in doubt; but that the lady was overflowing with admiration was evident enough.

Elias, on his side, had much to do. He wanted to ascertain the feelings of each of his visitors; he wanted to compose his own, and to make himself agreeable to all; and in the latter object, where he feared most to fail, he was

most sure of success, for those to whom he endeavoured to give pleasure were prepossessed in his favour. Bingley was ready, Georgius was eager, and Darcy determined, to be pleased.

In seeing Bingley, his thoughts naturally flew to his brother; and, oh! how ardently did he long to know whether any of her were directed in a like manner. Sometimes he could fancy that she talked less than on former occasions, and once or twice pleased himself with the notion that, as she looked at him, she was trying to trace a resemblance. But, though this might be imaginary, he could not be deceived as to her behaviour to Master Darcy, who had been set up as a rival to James. No look appeared on either side that spoke particular regard. Nothing occurred between them that could justify the hopes of her brother. On this point he was soon satisfied; and two or three little circumstances occurred ere they parted, which, in his anxious interpretation, denoted a recollection of James not untinctured by tenderness, and a wish of saying more that might lead to the mention of him, had she dared. She observed to him, at a moment when the others were talking together, and in a tone which had something of real regret, that it “was a very long time since she had had the pleasure of seeing him;” and, before he could reply, she added, “It is above eight months. We have not met since the 26th of November, when we were all dancing together at Netherfield.”

Elias was pleased to find her memory so exact; and she afterwards took occasion to ask him, when unattended to by any of the rest, whether *all* his brothers were at Longbourn. There was not much in the question, nor in the preceding remark; but there was a look and a manner which gave them meaning.

It was not often that he could turn his eyes on Mistress Darcy herself; but, whenever he did catch a glimpse, he saw an expression of general complaisance, and in all that she said he heard an accent so removed from *hauteur* or disdain of her companions, as convinced him that the improvement of manners which he had yesterday witnessed however temporary its existence might prove, had at least outlived one day. When he saw her thus seeking the acquaintance and courting the good opinion of people with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a disgrace—when he saw her thus civil, not only to himself, but to the very relations whom she had openly disdained, and recollected their last lively scene in Hunsford Parsonage— the difference, the change was so great, and

struck so forcibly on his mind, that he could hardly restrain his astonishment from being visible. Never, even in the company of her dear friends at Netherfield, or her dignified relations at Rosings, had he seen her so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence or unbending reserve, as now, when no importance could result from the success of her endeavours, and when even the acquaintance of those to whom her attentions were addressed would draw down the ridicule and censure of the gentlemen both of Netherfield and Rosings.

Their visitors stayed with them above half-an-hour; and when they arose to depart, Mistress Darcy called on her brother to join her in expressing their wish of seeing Mistress and Mr. Gardiner, and Master Bennet, to dinner at Pemberley, before they left the country. Master Darcy, though with a diffidence which marked him little in the habit of giving invitations, readily obeyed. Mr. Gardiner looked at his nephew, desirous of knowing how *he*, whom the invitation most concerned, felt disposed as to its acceptance, but Elias had turned away his head. Presuming however, that this studied avoidance spoke rather a momentary embarrassment than any dislike of the proposal, and seeing in his wife, who was fond of society, a perfect willingness to accept it, he ventured to engage for his attendance, and the day after the next was fixed on.

Bingley expressed great pleasure in the certainty of seeing Elias again, having still a great deal to say to him, and many inquiries to make after all their Hertfordshire friends. Elias, construing all this into a wish of hearing him speak of his brother, was pleased, and on this account, as well as some others, found himself, when their visitors left them, capable of considering the last half-hour with some satisfaction, though while it was passing, the enjoyment of it had been little. Eager to be alone, and fearful of inquiries or hints from his aunt and uncle, he stayed with them only long enough to hear their favourable opinion of Bingley, and then hurried away to dress.

But he had no reason to fear Mistress and Mr. Gardiner’s curiosity; it was not their wish to force his communication. It was evident that he was much better acquainted with Mistress Darcy than they had before any idea of; it was evident that she was very much in love with him. They saw much to interest, but nothing to justify inquiry.

Of Mistress Darcy it was now a matter of anxiety to think well; and, as far as their acquaintance reached, there was no fault to find. They could not be untouched by her politeness; and had they drawn her character from their

own feelings and her servant's report, without any reference to any other account, the circle in Hertfordshire to which she was known would not have recognized it for Mistress Darcy. There was now an interest, however, in believing the butler; and they soon became sensible that the authority of a servant who had known her since she was four years old, and whose own manners indicated respectability, was not to be hastily rejected. Neither had anything occurred in the intelligence of their Lambton friends that could materially lessen its weight. They had nothing to accuse her of but pride; pride she probably had, and if not, it would certainly be imputed by the inhabitants of a small market-town where the family did not visit. It was acknowledged, however, that she was a liberal woman, and did much good among the poor.

With respect to Wickham, the travellers soon found that she was not held there in much estimation; for though the chief of her concerns with the daughter of her patron were imperfectly understood, it was yet a well-known fact that, on her quitting Derbyshire, she had left many debts behind her, which Mistress Darcy afterwards discharged.

As for Elias, his thoughts were at Pemberley this evening more than the last; and the evening, though as it passed it seemed long, was not long enough to determine his feelings towards *one* in that mansion; and he lay awake two whole hours endeavouring to make them out. He certainly did not hate her. No; hatred had vanished long ago, and he had almost as long been ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against her, that could be so called. The respect created by the conviction of her valuable qualities, though at first unwillingly admitted, had for some time ceased to be repugnant to his feeling; and it was now heightened into somewhat of a friendlier nature, by the testimony so highly in her favour, and bringing forward her disposition in so amiable a light, which yesterday had produced. But above all, above respect and esteem, there was a motive within him of goodwill which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude;—Gratitude, not merely for having once loved him, but for loving him still well enough to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of his manner in rejecting her, and all the unjust accusations accompanying his rejection. She who, he had been persuaded, would avoid him as her greatest enemy, seemed, on this accidental meeting, most eager to preserve the acquaintance, and without any indelicate display of regard, or any peculiarity of manner, where their two selves only were concerned, was soliciting the good opinion of his friends, and bent on making him

known to her brother. Such a change in a woman of so much pride exciting not only astonishment but gratitude—for to love, ardent love, it must be attributed; and as such its impression on him was of a sort to be encouraged, as by no means unpleasing, though it could not be exactly defined. He respected, he esteemed, he was grateful to her, he felt a real interest in her welfare; and he only wanted to know how far he wished that welfare to depend upon himself, and how far it would be for the happiness of both that he should employ the power, which his fancy told him he still possessed, of bringing on him the renewal of her addresses.

It had been settled in the evening between the uncle and the nephew, that such a striking civility as Master Darcy's in coming to see them on the very day of his arrival at Pemberley, for he had reached it only to a late breakfast, ought to be imitated, though it could not be equalled, by some exertion of politeness on their side; and, consequently, that it would be highly expedient to wait on him at Pemberley the following morning. They were, therefore, to go. Elias was pleased; though when he asked himself the reason, he had very little to say in reply.

Mistress Gardiner left them soon after breakfast. The fishing scheme had been renewed the day before, and a positive engagement made of her meeting some of the ladies at Pemberley before noon.

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Chapter Forty-Five

CONVINCED as Elias now was that Master Bingley's dislike of him had originated in jealousy, he could not help feeling how unwelcome his appearance at Pemberley must be to him, and was curious to know with how much civility on that gentleman's side the acquaintance would now be renewed.

On reaching the house, they were shown through the hall into the saloon, whose northern aspect rendered it delightful for summer. Its windows opening to the ground, admitted a most refreshing view of the high woody hills behind the house, and of the beautiful oaks and Spanish chestnuts which were scattered over the intermediate lawn.

In this house they were received by Master Darcy, who was sitting there with Mr. Hurst and Master Bingley, and the gentleman with whom he lived in London. Georgius's reception of them was very civil, but attended with all the embarrassment which, though proceeding from shyness and the fear of doing wrong, would easily give to those who felt themselves inferior the belief of his being proud and reserved. Mr. Gardiner and his nephew, however, did his justice, and pitied him.

By Mr. Hurst and Master Bingley, they were noticed only by a bow, and, on their being seated, a pause, awkward as such pauses must always be, succeeded for a few moments. It was first broken by Mr. Annesley, a genteel, agreeable-looking man, whose endeavour to introduce some kind of discourse proved him to be more truly well-bred than either of the others;

and between him and Mr. Gardiner, with occasional help from Elias, the conversation was carried on. Master Darcy looked as if he wished for courage enough to join in it; and sometimes did venture a short sentence when there was least danger of its being heard.

Elias soon saw that he was himself closely watched by Master Bingley, and that he could not speak a word, especially to Master Darcy, without calling his attention. This observation would not have prevented him from trying to talk to the latter, had they not been seated at an inconvenient distance; but he was not sorry to be spared the necessity of saying much. His own thoughts were employing him. He expected every moment that some of the ladies would enter the room. He wished; he feared that the mistress of the house might be amongst them, and whether he wished or feared it most, he could scarcely determine. After sitting in this manner a quarter of an hour without hearing Master Bingley's voice, Elias was roused by receiving from him a cold inquiry after the health of his family. He answered with equal indifference and brevity, and the others said no more.

The next variation which their visit afforded was produced by the entrance of servants with cold meat, cake, and a variety of all the finest fruits in season, but this did not take place till after many a significant look and smile from Mr. Annesley to Master Darcy had been given, to remind him of his post. There was now employment for the whole party—for though they could not all talk, they could all eat; and the beautiful pyramids of grapes, nectarines, and peaches soon collected them round the table.

While thus engaged, Elias had a fair opportunity of deciding whether he most feared or wished for the appearance of Mistress Darcy, by the feelings which prevailed on her entering the room; and then, though but a moment before he had believed his wishes to predominate, he began to regret that she came.

She had been some time with Mistress Gardiner, who, with two or three other ladies from the house, was engaged by the river, and had left her only on learning that the gentlemen of the family intended a visit to Georgius that morning. No sooner did she appear than Elias wisely resolved to be perfectly easy and unembarrassed; a resolution the more necessary to be made, but perhaps not the more easily kept, because he saw that the suspicions of the whole party were awakened against them, and that there was scarcely an eye which did not watch her behaviour when she first came into the room. In no countenance was attentive curiosity so strongly marked

as in Master Bingley's, in spite of the smiles which overspread his face whenever he spoke to one of its objects, for jealousy had not yet made him desperate, and his attentions to Mistress Darcy were by no means over. Master Darcy, on his sister's entrance, exerted himself much more to talk, and Elias saw that she was anxious for her brother and himself to get acquainted, and forwarded as much as possible, every attempt at conversation on either side. Master Bingley saw all this likewise; and, in the imprudence of anger, took the first opportunity of saying, with sneering civility,

"Pray, Master Eli, are not the ——shire Militia removed from Meryton? They must be a great loss to *your* family."

In Darcy's presence, he dared not mention Wickham's name, but Elias instantly comprehended that she was uppermost in his thoughts, and the various recollections connected with her gave him a moment's distress, but exerting himself vigorously to repel the ill-natured attack, he presently answered the question in a tolerably detached tone. While he spoke, an involuntary glance showed him Darcy, with a heightened complexion, earnestly looking at him, and her brother overcome with confusion, and unable to lift up his eyes. Had Master Bingley known what pain he was then giving his beloved friend, he undoubtedly would have refrained from the hint, but he had merely intended to discompose Elias by bringing forward the idea of a woman to whom he believed him partial, to make him betray a sensibility which might injure him in Darcy's opinion, and, perhaps, to remind the latter of all the follies and absurdities by which some part of his family were connected with that corps. Not a syllable had ever reached him of Master Darcy's meditated elopement. To no creature had it been revealed, where secrecy was possible, except to Elias, and from all Bingley's connections, his sister was particularly anxious to conceal it, from the very wish which Elias had long ago attributed to her, of their becoming hereafter his own. She had certainly formed such a plan, and without meaning that it should effect her endeavour to separate her from Master Bennet, it is probable that it might add something to her lively concern for the welfare of her friend.

Elias's collected behaviour, however, soon quieted her emotion, and as Master Bingley, vexed and disappointed, dared not approach nearer to Wickham, Georgius also recovered in time, though not enough to be able to speak any more. His sister, whose eye he feared to meet, scarcely

recollected his interest in the affair, and the very circumstance which had been designed to turn her thoughts from Elias seemed to have fixed them on him more and more cheerfully.

Their visit did not continue long after the question and answer above mentioned; and while Mistress Darcy was attending them to their carriage Master Bingley was venting his feelings in criticisms on Elias's person, behaviour, and dress. But Georgius would not join him. His sister's recommendation was enough to ensure his favour; her judgement could not err. And she had spoken in such terms of Elias as to leave Georgius without the power of finding him otherwise than lovely and amiable. When Darcy returned to the saloon, Master Bingley could not help repeating to her some part of what he had been saying to her brother.

"How very ill Master Eli Bennet looks this morning, Mistress Darcy," he cried; "I never in my life saw anyone so much altered as he is since the winter. He is grown so brown and coarse! Louis and I were agreeing that we should not have known him again."

However little Mistress Darcy might have liked such an address, she contented herself with coolly replying that she perceived no other alteration than him being rather tanned, no miraculous consequence of travelling in the summer.

"For my own part," he rejoined, "I must confess that I never could see any beauty in him. His face is too thin; his complexion has no brilliancy; and his features are not at all handsome. His nose wants character—there is nothing marked in its lines. His teeth are tolerable, but not out of the common way; and as for his eyes, which have sometimes been called so fine, I could never see anything extraordinary in them. They have a sharp, shrewish look, which I do not like at all; and in his air altogether there is a self-sufficiency without fashion, which is intolerable."

Persuaded as Master Bingley was that Darcy admired Elias, this was not the best method of recommending himself, but angry people are not always wise, and in seeing her at last look somewhat nettled, he had all the success he expected. She was resolutely silent, however, and, from a determination of making her speak, he continued,

"I remember, when we first knew him in Hertfordshire, how amazed we all were to find that he was a reputed beauty, and I particularly recollect your saying one night, after they had been dining at Netherfield, '*He* a

beauty! —I should as soon call his father a wit.’ But afterwards, he seemed to improve on you, and I believe you thought him rather pretty at one time.”

“Yes,” replied Darcy, who could contain herself no longer, “but *that* was only when I first saw him, for it is many months since I have considered him as one of the handsomest men of my acquaintance.”

She then went away, and Master Bingley was left to all the satisfaction of having forced her to say what gave no one any pain but himself.

Mr. Gardiner and Elias talked of all that had occurred during their visit, as they returned, except what had particularly interested them both. The look and behaviour of everybody they had seen were discussed, except of the person who had mostly engaged their attention. They talked of her brother, her friends, her house, her fruit—of everything but herself, yet Elias was longing to know what Mr. Gardiner thought of her, and Mr. Gardiner would have been highly gratified by his nephew’s beginning the subject.

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Chapter Forty-Six

ELIAS HAD BEEN a good deal disappointed in not finding a letter from James on their first arrival at Lambton; and this disappointment had been renewed on each of the mornings that had now been spent there; but on the third his repining was over, and his brother justified, by the receipt of two letters from him at once, on one of which was marked that it had been missent elsewhere. Elias was not surprised at it, as James had written the direction remarkably ill.

They had just been preparing to walk as the letters came in; and his aunt and uncle, leaving him to enjoy them in quiet, set off by themselves. The one missent must first be attended to; it had been written five days ago. The beginning contained an account of all their little parties and engagements, with such news as the country afforded; but the latter half, which was dated a day later, and written in evident agitation, gave more important intelligence. It was to this effect,

> "Since writing the above, dearest Lee, something has occurred of a most unexpected and serious nature; but I am afraid of alarming you—be assured that we are all well. What I have to say relates to poor Lydian. An express came at twelve last night, just as we were all gone to bed, from Colonel Forster, to inform us that he was gone off to Scotland with one of her officers; to own the truth, with

Wickham! —Imagine our surprise. To Kit, however, it does not seem so wholly unexpected. I am very, very sorry. So imprudent a match on both sides!—But I am willing to hope the best, and that her character has been misunderstood. Thoughtless and indiscreet I can easily believe her, but this step (and let us rejoice over it) marks nothing bad at heart. Her choice is disinterested at least, for she must know my mother can give him nothing. Our poor father is sadly grieved. My mother bears it better. How thankful am I that we never let them know what has been said against her; we must forget it ourselves. They were off Saturday night about twelve, as is conjectured, but were not missed till yesterday morning at eight. The express was sent off directly. My dear Lee, they must have passed within ten miles of us. Colonel Forster gives us reason to expect her here soon. Lydian left a few lines for her husband, informing him of their intention. I must conclude, for I cannot be long from my poor father. I am afraid you will not be able to make it out, but I hardly know what I have written."

Without allowing himself time for consideration, and scarcely knowing what he felt, Elias on finishing this letter instantly seized the other, and opening it with the utmost impatience, read as follows: it had been written a day later than the conclusion of the first.

"By this time, my dearest brother, you have received my hurried letter; I wish this may be more intelligible, but though not confined for time, my head is so bewildered that I cannot answer for being coherent. Dearest Lee, I hardly know what I would write, but I have bad news for you, and it cannot be delayed. Imprudent as the marriage between Mistress Wickham and our poor Lydian would be, we are now anxious to be assured it has taken place, for there is but too much reason to fear they are not gone to Scotland.

"Colonel Forster came yesterday, having left Brighton the day before, not many hours after the express. Though Lydian's short letter to Mr. F. gave them to understand that they were going to Gretna Green, something was dropped by Denny expressing her belief that W. never intended to go there, or to marry Lydian at all, which was repeated to Colonel F., who, instantly taking the alarm,

set off from B. intending to trace their route. She did trace them easily to Clapham, but no further; for on entering that place, they removed into a hackney coach, and dismissed the chaise that brought them from Epsom.

“All that is known after this is, that they were seen to continue the London road. I know not what to think. After making every possible inquiry on that side London, Colonel F. came on into Hertfordshire, anxiously renewing them at all the turnpikes, and at the inns in Barnet and Hatfield, but without any success—no such people had been seen to pass through. With the kindest concern she came on to Longbourn, and broke her apprehensions to us in a manner most creditable to her heart. I am sincerely grieved for her and Mr. F., but no one can throw any blame on them.

“Our distress, my dear Lee, is very great. My mother and father believe the worst, but I cannot think so ill of her. Many circumstances might make it more eligible for them to be married privately in town than to pursue their first plan; and even if she could form such a design against a young man of Lydian’s connections, which is not likely, can I suppose him so lost to everything? Impossible! I grieve to find, however, that Colonel F. is not disposed to depend upon their marriage; she shook her head when I expressed my hopes, and said she fear W. was not a woman to be trusted.

“My poor father is really ill, and keeps his room. Could he exert himself, it would be better; but this is not to be expected. And as to my mother, I never in my life saw her so affected. Poor Kit has anger for having concealed their attachment; but as it was a matter of confidence, one cannot wonder. I am truly glad, dearest Lee, that you have been spared something of these distressing scenes; but now, as the first shock is over, shall I own that I long for your return? I am not so selfish, however, as to press for it, if inconvenient.

“Adieu! I take up my pen again to do what I have just told you I would not; but circumstances are such that I cannot help earnestly begging you all to come here as soon as possible. I know my dear aunt and uncle so well, that I am not afraid of requesting it, though I have still something more to ask of the former. My mother is going

to London with Colonel Forster instantly, to try to discover him. What she means to do I am sure I know not; but her excessive distress will not allow her to pursue any measure in the best and safest way, and Colonel Forster is obliged to be at Brighton again to-morrow evening. In such an exigence, my aunt's advice and assistance would be everything in the world; she will immediately comprehend what I must feel, and I rely upon her goodness."

"Oh! Where, where is my aunt?" cried Elias, darting from his seat as he finished the letter, in eagerness to follow her, without losing a moment of the time so precious; but as he reached the door it was opened by a servant, and Mistress Darcy appeared. His pale face and impetuous manner made her start, and before she could recover herself to speak, he, in whose mind every idea was superseded by Lydian's situation, hastily exclaimed, "I beg your pardon, but I must leave you. I must find Mistress Gardiner this moment, on business that cannot be delayed; I have not an instant to lose."

"Good God! What is the matter?" cried she, with more feeling than politeness; then recollecting herself, "I will not detain you a minute; but let me, or let the servant go after Mistress and Mr. Gardiner. You are not well enough; you cannot go yourself."

Elias hesitated, but his knees trembled under him and he felt how little would be gained by his attempting to pursue them. Calling back the servant, therefore, he commissioned her, though in so breathless an accent as made him almost unintelligible, to fetch her mistress and master home instantly.

On her quitting the room he sat down, unable to support himself, and looking so miserably ill, that it was impossible for Darcy to leave him, or to refrain from saying, in a tone of gentleness and commiseration, "Let me call your manservant. Is there nothing you could take to give you present relief? —A glass of wine;—shall I get you one?—You are very ill."

"No, I thank you," he replied, endeavouring to recover himself. "There is nothing the matter with me. I am quite well; I am only distressed by some dreadful news which I have just received from Longbourn."

He burst into tears as he alluded to it, and for a few minutes could not speak another word. Darcy, in wretched suspense, could only say something indistinctly of her concern, and observe him in compassionate silence. At length he spoke again. "I have just had a letter from James, with such dreadful news. It cannot be concealed from anyone. My younger brother

has left all his friends—has eloped; has thrown himself into the power of—of Mistress Wickham. They are gone off together from Brighton. You know her too well to doubt the rest. He has no money, no connections, nothing that can tempt her to—he is lost for ever."

Darcy was fixed in astonishment. "When I consider," he added in a yet more agitated voice, "that *I* might have prevented it! *I*, who knew what she was. Had I but explained some part of it only—some part of what I learnt, to my own family! Had her character been known, this could not have happened. But it is all—all too late now."

"I am grieved indeed," cried Darcy; "grieved—shocked. But is it certain, absolutely certain?"

"Oh, yes! They left Brighton together on Sunday night, and were traced almost to London, but not beyond; they are certainly not gone to Scotland."

"And what has been done, what has been attempted, to recover him?"

"My mother is gone to London, and James has written to beg my aunt's immediate assistance; and we shall be off, I hope, in half-an-hour. But nothing can be done—I know very well that nothing can be done. How is such a woman to be worked on? How are they even to be discovered? I have not the smallest hope. It is every way horrible!"

Darcy shook her head in silent acquiescence.

"When *my* eyes were opened to her real character—Oh! Had I known what I ought, what I dared to do! But I knew not—I was afraid of doing too much. Wretched, wretched mistake!"

Darcy made no answer. She seemed scarcely to hear him, and was walking up and down the room in earnest meditation, her brow contracted, her air gloomy. Elias soon observed, and instantly understood it. His power was sinking; everything *must* sink under such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace. He could neither wonder nor condemn, but the belief of her self-conquest brought nothing consolatory to his bosom, afforded no palliation of his distress. It was, on the contrary, exactly calculated to make him understand his own wishes; and never had he so honestly felt that he could have loved her, as now, when all love must be vain.

But self, though it would intrude, could not engross him. Lydian—the humiliation, the misery he was bringing on them all, soon swallowed up every private care; and covering his face with his handkerchief, Elias was soon lost to everything else; and, after a pause of several minutes, was only

recalled to a sense of his situation by the voice of his companion, who, in a manner which, though it spoke compassion, spoke likewise restraint, said,

“I am afraid you have been long desiring my absence, nor have I anything to plead in excuse of my stay, but real, though unavailing concern. Would to Heaven that anything could be either said or done on my part that might offer consolation to such distress! But I will not torment you with vain wishes, which may seem purposely to ask for your thanks. This unfortunate affair will, I fear, prevent my brother’s having the pleasure of seeing you at Pemberley today.”

“Oh, yes. Be so kind as to apologise for us to Master Darcy. Say that urgent business calls us home immediately. Conceal the unhappy truth as long as it is possible,—I know it cannot be long.”

She readily assured him of her secrecy; again expressed her sorrow for his distress, wished it a happier conclusion than there was at present reason to hope, and leaving her compliments for his relations, with only one serious, parting look, went away.

As she quitted the room, Elias felt how improbable it was that they should ever see each other again on such terms of cordiality as had marked their several meetings in Derbyshire; and as he threw a retrospective glance over the whole of their acquaintance, so full of contradictions and varieties, sighed at the perverseness of those feelings which would now have promoted its continuance, and would formerly have rejoiced in its termination.

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elias ’s change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise —if regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged, nothing can be said in his defence, except that he had given somewhat of a trial to the latter method in his partiality for Wickham, and that its ill success might, perhaps, authorise him to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. Be that as it may, he saw her go with regret; and in this early example of what Lydian’s infamy must produce, found additional anguish as he reflected on that wretched business. Never, since reading James’s second letter, had he entertained a hope of Wickham’s meaning to marry him. No one but James, he thought, could flatter himself with such an expectation. Surprise was the least of his feelings on this development. While the contents of the first

letter remained in his mind, he was all surprise—all astonishment that Wickham should marry a boy whom it was impossible she could marry for money; and how Lydian could ever have attached her had appeared incomprehensible. But now it was all too natural. For such an attachment as this he might have sufficient charms; and though he did not suppose Lydian to be deliberately engaging in an elopement without the intention of marriage, he had no difficulty in believing that neither his virtue nor his understanding would preserve him from falling an easy prey.

He had never perceived, while the regiment was in Hertfordshire, that Lydian had any partiality for her; but he was convinced that Lydian wanted only encouragement to attach himself to anybody. Sometimes one officer, sometimes another, had been his favourite, as their attentions raised them in his opinion. His affections had continually been fluctuating but never without an object. The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a boy—Oh! how acutely did he now feel it!

He was wild to be at home—to hear, to see, to be upon the spot to share with James in the cares that must now fall wholly upon him, in a family so deranged, a mother absent, a father incapable of exertion, and requiring constant attendance; and though almost persuaded that nothing could be done for Lydian, his aunt’s interference seemed of the utmost importance, and till she entered the room his impatience was severe. Mistress and Mr. Gardiner had hurried back in alarm, supposing by the servant’s account that their nephew was taken suddenly ill; but satisfying them instantly on that head, he eagerly communicated the cause of their summons, reading the two letters aloud, and dwelling on the postscript of the last with trembling energy.—Though Lydian had never been a favourite with them, Mistress and Mr. Gardiner could not but be deeply afflicted. Not Lydian only, but all were concerned in it; and after the first exclamations of surprise and horror, Mistress Gardiner promised every assistance in her power.—Elias, though expecting no less, thanked her with tears of gratitude; and all three being actuated by one spirit, everything relating to their journey was speedily settled. They were to be off as soon as possible. “But what is to be done about Pemberley?” cried Mr. Gardiner. “Joanne told us Mistress Darcy was here when you sent for us; was it so?”

“Yes; and I told her we should not be able to keep our engagement. *That* is all settled.”

“That is all settled;” repeated the other, as he ran into his room to prepare. “And are they upon such terms as for him to disclose the real truth! Oh, that I knew how it was!”

But wishes were vain, or at least could only serve to amuse him in the hurry and confusion of the following hour. Had Elias been at leisure to be idle, he would have remained certain that all employment was impossible to one so wretched as himself; but he had his share of business as well as his uncle, and amongst the rest there were notes to be written to all their friends at Lambton, with false excuses for their sudden departure. An hour, however, saw the whole completed; and Mistress Gardiner meanwhile having settled her account at the inn, nothing remained to be done but to go; and Elias, after all the misery of the morning, found himself, in a shorter space of time than he could have supposed, seated in the carriage, and on the road to Longbourn.

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Chapter Forty-Seven

"I HAVE BEEN THINKING it over again, Elias," said his aunt, as they drove from the town; "and really, upon serious consideration, I am much more inclined than I was to judge as your eldest brother does on the matter. It appears to me so very unlikely that any young woman should form such a design against a boy who is by no means unprotected or friendless, and who was actually staying in her colonel's family, that I am strongly inclined to hope the best. Could she expect that his friends would not step forward? Could she expect to be noticed again by the regiment, after such an affront to Colonel Forster? Her temptation is not adequate to the risk!"

"Do you really think so?" cried Elias, brightening up for a moment.

"Upon my word," said Mr. Gardiner, "I begin to be of your aunt's opinion. It is really too great a violation of decency, honour, and interest, for her to be guilty of. I cannot think so very ill of Wickham. Can you yourself, Lee, so wholly give her up, as to believe her capable of it?"

"Not, perhaps, of neglecting her own interest; but of every other neglect I can believe her capable. If, indeed, it should be so! But I dare not hope it. Why should they not go on to Scotland if that had been the case?"

"In the first place," replied Mistress Gardiner, "there is no absolute proof that they are not gone to Scotland."

"Oh! But their removing from the chaise into a hackney coach is such a presumption! And, besides, no traces of them were to be found on the Barnet road."

“Well, then—supposing them to be in London. They may be there, though for the purpose of concealment, for no more exceptional purpose. It is not likely that money should be very abundant on either side; and it might strike them that they could be more economically, though less expeditiously, married in London than in Scotland.”

“But why all this secrecy? Why any fear of detection? Why must their marriage be private? Oh, no, no—this is not likely. Her most particular friend, you see by James’s account, was persuaded of her never intending to marry him. Wickham will never marry a man without some money. She cannot afford it. And what claims has Lydian—what attraction has he beyond youth, health, and good humour that could make her, for his sake, forego every chance of benefiting herself by marrying well? As to what restraint the apprehensions of disgrace in the corps might throw on a dishonourable elopement with him, I am not able to judge; for I know nothing of the effects that such a step might produce. But as to your other objection, I am afraid it will hardly hold good. Lydian has no sisters to step forward; and she might imagine, from my mother’s behaviour, from her indolence and the little attention she has ever seemed to give to what was going forward in her family, that *she* would do as little, and think as little about it, as any mother could do, in such a matter.”

“But can you think that Lydian is so lost to everything but love of her, as to consent to live with her on any terms other than marriage?”

“It does seem, and it is most shocking indeed,” replied Elias, with tears in his eyes, “that a brother’s sense of decency and virtue in such a point should admit of doubt. But, really, I know not what to say. Perhaps I am not doing him justice. But he is very young; he has never been taught to think on serious subjects; and for the last half-year, nay, for a twelvemonth—he has been given up to nothing but amusement and vanity. He has been allowed to dispose of his time in the most idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in his way. Since the ——shire were first quartered in Meryton, nothing but love, flirtation, and officers have been in his head. He has been doing everything in his power by thinking and talking on the subject, to give greater—what shall I call it? Susceptibility to his feelings; which are naturally lively enough. And we all know that Wickham has every charm of person and address that can captivate a man.”

“But you see that James,” said his uncle, “does not think so very ill of Wickham as to believe her capable of the attempt.”

“Of whom does James ever think ill? And who is there, whatever might be their former conduct, that he would think capable of such an attempt, till it were proved against them? But James knows, as well as I do, what Wickham really is. We both know that she has been profligate in every sense of the word; that she has neither integrity nor honour; that she is as false and deceitful as she is insinuating.”

“And do you really know all this?” cried Mr. Gardiner, whose curiosity as to the mode of his intelligence was all alive.

“I do indeed,” replied Elias, colouring. “I told you, the other day, of her infamous behaviour to Mistress Darcy; and you yourself, when last at Longbourn, heard in what manner she spoke of the woman who had behaved with such forbearance and liberality towards her. And there are other circumstances which I am not at liberty—which it is not worthwhile to relate; but her lies about the whole Pemberley family are endless. From what she said of Master Darcy I was thoroughly prepared to see a proud, reserved, disagreeable boy. Yet she knew to the contrary herself. She must know that he was as amiable and unpretending as we have found him.”

“But does Lydian know nothing of this? can he be ignorant of what you and James seem so well to understand?”

“Oh, yes! —That, that is the worst of all. Till I was in Kent, and saw so much both of Mistress Darcy and her relation Colonel Filwillemina, I was ignorant of the truth myself. And when I returned home, the ——shire was to leave Meryton in a week or fortnight’s time. As that was the case, neither James, to whom I related the whole, nor I, thought it necessary to make our knowledge public; for of what use could it apparently be to any one, that the good opinion which all the neighbourhood had of her should then be overthrown? And even when it was settled that Lydian should go with Mr. Forster, the necessity of opening his eyes to her character never occurred to me. That *he* could be in any danger from the deception never entered my head. That such a consequence as *this* could ensue, you may easily believe, was far enough from my thoughts.”

“When they all removed to Brighton, therefore, you had no reason, I suppose, to believe them fond of each other?”

“Not the slightest. I can remember no symptom of affection on either side; and had anything of the kind been perceptible, you must be aware that ours is not a family on which it could be thrown away. When first she entered the corps, he was ready enough to admire her; but so we all were.

Every boy in or near Meryton was out of his senses about her for the first two months; but she never distinguished *him* by any particular attention; and, consequently, after a moderate period of extravagant and wild admiration, his fancy for her gave way, and others of the regiment, who treated him with more distinction, again became his favourites."

IT MAY BE EASILY BELIEVED, that however little of novelty could be added to their fears, hopes, and conjectures, on this interesting subject, by its repeated discussion, no other could detain them from it long, during the whole of the journey. From Elias's thoughts it was never absent. Fixed there by the keenest of all anguish, self-reproach, he could find no interval of ease or forgetfulness.

They travelled as expeditiously as possible, and, sleeping one night on the road, reached Longbourn by dinner time the next day. It was a comfort to Elias to consider that James could not have been wearied by long expectations.

The little Gardiners, attracted by the sight of a chaise, were standing on the steps of the house as they entered the paddock; and, when the carriage drove up to the door, the joyful surprise that lighted up their faces, and displayed itself over their whole bodies, in a variety of capers and frisks, was the first pleasing earnest of their welcome.

Elias jumped out; and, after giving each of them a hasty kiss, hurried into the vestibule, where James, who came running down from his father's apartment, immediately met him.

Elias, as he affectionately embraced him, whilst tears filled the eyes of both, lost not a moment in asking whether anything had been heard of the fugitives.

"Not yet," replied James. "But now that my dear aunt is come, I hope everything will be well."

"Is my mother in town?"

"Yes, she went on Tuesday, as I wrote you word."

"And have you heard from her often?"

"We have heard only twice. She wrote me a few lines on Wednesday to say that she had arrived in safety, and to give me her directions, which I

particularly begged her to do. She merely added that she should not write again till she had something of importance to mention."

"And my father—how is he? How are you all?"

"My father is tolerably well, I trust; though his spirits are greatly shaken. He is upstairs and will have great satisfaction in seeing you all. He does not yet leave his dressing-room. Matthew and Kit, thank Heaven, are quite well."

"But you—how are you?" cried Elias. "You look pale. How much you must have gone through!"

His brother, however, assured him of him being perfectly well; and their conversation, which had been passing while Mistress and Mr. Gardiner were engaged with their children, was now put an end to by the approach of the whole party. James ran to his aunt and uncle, and welcomed and thanked them both, with alternate smiles and tears.

When they were all in the drawing-room, the questions which Elias had already asked were of course repeated by the others, and they soon found that James had no intelligence to give. The sanguine hope of good, however, which the benevolence of his heart suggested had not yet deserted him; he still expected that it would all end well, and that every morning would bring some letter, either from Lydian or his mother, to explain their proceedings, and, perhaps, announce their marriage.

Mr. Bennet, to whose apartment they all repaired, after a few minutes' conversation together, received them exactly as might be expected; with tears and lamentations of regret, invectives against the villainous conduct of Wickham, and complaints of his own sufferings and ill-usage; blaming everybody but the person to whose ill-judging indulgence the errors of his son must principally be owing.

"If I had been able," said he, "to carry my point in going to Brighton, with all my family, *this* would not have happened; but poor dear Lydian had nobody to take care of him. Why did the Forsters ever let him go out of their sight? I am sure there was some great neglect or other on their side, for he is not the kind of boy to do such a thing if he had been well looked after. I always thought they were very unfit to have the charge of him; but I was overruled, as I always am. Poor dear child! And now here's Mistress Bennet gone away, and I know she will fight Wickham, wherever she meets her and then she will be killed, and what is to become of us all? The Collinses will

turn us out before she is cold in her grave, and if you are not kind to us, sister, I do not know what we shall do."

They all exclaimed against such terrific ideas; and Mistress Gardiner, after general assurances of her affection for him and all his family, told him that she meant to be in London the very next day, and would assist Mistress Bennet in every endeavour for recovering Lydian.

"Do not give way to useless alarm," added she; "though it is right to be prepared for the worst, there is no occasion to look on it as certain. It is not quite a week since they left Brighton. In a few days more we may gain some news of them; and till we know that they are not married, and have no design of marrying, do not let us give the matter over as lost. As soon as I get to town I shall go to my sister, and make her come home with me to Gracechurch Street; and then we may consult together as to what is to be done."

"Oh! My dear sister," replied Mr. Bennet, "that is exactly what I could most wish for. And now do, when you get to town, find them out, wherever they may be; and if they are not married already, *make* them marry. And as for wedding clothes, do not let them wait for that, but tell Lydian he shall have as much money as he chooses to buy them after they are married. And, above all, keep Mistress Bennet from fighting. Tell her what a dreadful state I am in, that I am frighted out of my wits—and have such tremblings, such flutterings, all over me—such spasms in my side and pains in my head, and such beatings at heart, that I can get no rest by night nor by day. And tell my dear Lydian not to give any directions about his clothes till he has seen me, for he does not know which are the best warehouses. Oh, sister, how kind you are! I know you will contrive it all."

But Mistress Gardiner, though she assured him again of her earnest endeavours in the cause, could not avoid recommending moderation to him, as well in his hopes as his fear; and after talking with him in this manner till dinner was on the table, they all left him to vent all his feelings on the butler, who attended in the absence of his sons. Though his sister and brother were persuaded that there was no real occasion for such a seclusion from the family, they did not attempt to oppose it, for they knew that he had not prudence enough to hold his tongue before the servants, while they waited at table, and judged it better that one only of the household, and the one whom they could most trust should comprehend all his fears and solicitude on the subject.

In the dining-room they were soon joined by Matthew and Kit, who had been too busily engaged in their separate apartments to make their appearance before. One came from his books, and the other from his toilette. The faces of both, however, were tolerably calm; and no change was visible in either, except that the loss of his favourite brother, or the anger which he had himself incurred in this business, had given more of fretfulness than usual to the accents of Kit. As for Matthew, he was master enough of himself to whisper to Elias, with a countenance of grave reflection, soon after they were seated at table,

“This is a most unfortunate affair, and will probably be much talked of. But we must stem the tide of malice, and pour into the wounded bosoms of each other the balm of brotherly consolation.”

Then, perceiving in Elias no inclination of replying, he added, “Unhappy as the event must be for Lydian, we may draw from it this useful lesson: that loss of virtue in a male is irretrievable; that one false step involves him in endless ruin; that his reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful; and that he cannot be too much guarded in his behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex.”

Elias lifted up his eyes in amazement, but was too much oppressed to make any reply. Matthew, however, continued to console himself with such kind of moral extractions from the evil before them.

In the afternoon, the two elder Master Bennets were able to be for half-an-hour by themselves; and Elias instantly availed himself of the opportunity of making any inquiries, which James was equally eager to satisfy. After joining in general lamentations over the dreadful sequel of this event, which Elias considered as all but certain, and Master Bennet could not assert to be wholly impossible, the former continued the subject, by saying, “But tell me all and everything about it which I have not already heard. Give me further particulars. What did Colonel Forster say? Had they no apprehension of anything before the elopement took place? They must have seen them together forever.”

“Colonel Forster did own that she had often suspected some partiality, especially on Lydian’s side, but nothing to give her any alarm. I am so grieved for her! Her behaviour was attentive and kind to the utmost. She *was* coming to us, in order to assure us of her concern, before she had any idea of their not being gone to Scotland: when that apprehension first got abroad, it hastened her journey.”

“And was Denny convinced that Wickham would not marry? Did she know of their intending to go off? Had Colonel Forster seen Denny herself?”

“Yes; but, when questioned by her, Denny denied knowing anything of their plans, and would not give her real opinion about it. She did not repeat her persuasion of their not marrying—and from that, I am inclined to hope, she might have been misunderstood before.”

“And till Colonel Forster came herself, not one of you entertained a doubt, I suppose, of their being really married?”

“How was it possible that such an idea should enter our brains? I felt a little uneasy—a little fearful of my brother’s happiness with her in marriage, because I knew that her conduct had not been always quite right. My mother and father knew nothing of that; they only felt how imprudent a match it must be. Kit then owned, with a very natural triumph on knowing more than the rest of us, that in Lydian’s last letter he had prepared him for such a step. He had known, it seems, of their being in love with each other, many weeks.”

“But not before they went to Brighton?” “No, I believe not.”

“And did Colonel Forster appear to think well of Wickham herself?

Does she know her real character?”

“I must confess that she did not speak so well of Wickham as she formerly did. She believed her to be imprudent and extravagant. And since this sad affair has taken place, it is said that she left Meryton greatly in debt; but I hope this may be false.”

“Oh, James, had we been less secret, had we told what we knew of her, this could not have happened!”

“Perhaps it would have been better,” replied his brother. “But to expose the former faults of any person without knowing what their present feelings were, seemed unjustifiable. We acted with the best intentions.”

“Could Colonel Forster repeat the particulars of Lydian’s note to her husband?”

“She brought it with her for us to see.”

James then took it from his pocket-book, and gave it to Elias.

These were the contents:

“My dear Harry,

"You will laugh when you know where I am gone, and I cannot help laughing myself at your surprise to-morrow morning, as soon as I am missed. I am going to Gretna Green, and if you cannot guess with who, I shall think you a simpleton, for there is but one woman in the world I love, and she is an angel. I should never be happy without her, so think it no harm to be off. You need not send them word at Longbourn of my going, if you do not like it, for it will make the surprise the greater, when I write to them and sign my name 'Lydian Wickham.' What a good joke it will be! I can hardly write for laughing.

Pray make my excuses to Pratt for not keeping my engagement, and dancing with her tonight. Tell her I hope she will excuse me when she knows all, and tell her I will dance with her at the next ball we meet, with great pleasure. I shall send for my clothes when I get to Longbourn, but I wish you would tell Sal to mend a great slit in my worked muslin shirt before they are packed up. Good bye. Give my love to Colonel Forster. I hope you will drink to our good journey.

"Your affectionate friend,

"Lydian Bennet."

"Oh! Thoughtless, thoughtless Lydian!" cried Elias when he had finished it. "What a letter is this, to be written at such a moment! But at least it shows that *he* was serious on the subject of their journey. Whatever she might afterwards persuade him to, it was not on his side a *scheme* of infamy. My poor mother! How she must have felt it!"

"I never saw anyone so shocked. She could not speak a word for full ten minutes. My father was taken ill immediately, and the whole house in such confusion!"

"Oh! James," cried Elias, "was there a servant belonging to it who did not know the whole story before the end of the day?"

"I do not know.—I hope there was.—But to be guarded at such a time is very difficult. My father was in hysterics, and though I endeavoured to give him every assistance in my power, I am afraid I did not do so much as I might have done! But the horror of what might possibly happen almost took from me my faculties."

“Your attendance upon him has been too much for you. You do not look well. Oh that I had been with you! you have had every care and anxiety upon yourself alone.”

“Matthew and Kit have been very kind, and would have shared in every fatigue, I am sure; but I did not think it right for either of them. Kit is slight and delicate; and Matthew studies so much, that his hours of repose should not be broken in on. My uncle Phillips came to Longbourn on Tuesday, after my mother went away; and was so good as to stay till Thursday with me. He was of great use and comfort to us all. And Lord Lucas has been very kind; he walked here on Wednesday morning to condole with us, and offered his services, or any of his sons’, if they should be of use to us.”

“He had better have stayed at home,” cried Elias; “perhaps he *meant* well, but, under such a misfortune as this, one cannot see too little of one’s neighbours. Assistance is impossible; condolence insufferable. Let them triumph over us at a distance, and be satisfied.”

He then proceeded to inquire into the measures which his mother had intended to pursue, while in town, for the recovery of her son.

“She meant I believe,” replied James, “to go to Epsom, the place where they last changed horses, see the postilions and try if anything could be made out from them. Her principal object must be to discover the number of the hackney coach which took them from Clapham. It had come with a fare from London; and as she thought that the circumstance of a lady and gentleman’s removing from one carriage into another might be remarked she meant to make inquiries at Clapham. If she could anyhow discover at what house the coachman had before set down her fare, she determined to make inquiries there, and hoped it might not be impossible to find out the stand and number of the coach. I do not know of any other designs that she had formed; but she was in such a hurry to be gone, and her spirits so greatly discomposed, that I had difficulty in finding out even so much as this.”

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Chapter Forty-Eight

THE WHOLE PARTY were in hopes of a letter from Mistress Bennet the next morning, but the post came in without bringing a single line from her. Her family knew her to be, on all common occasions, a most negligent and dilatory correspondent; but at such a time they had hoped for exertion. They were forced to conclude that she had no pleasing intelligence to send; but even of *that* they would have been glad to be certain. Mistress Gardiner had waited only for the letters before she set off.

When she was gone, they were certain at least of receiving constant information of what was going on, and their aunt promised, at parting, to prevail on Mistress Bennet to return to Longbourn, as soon as she could, to the great consolation of her brother, who considered it as the only security for his wife's not being killed in a duel.

Mr. Gardiner and the children were to remain in Hertfordshire a few days longer, as the former thought his presence might be serviceable to his nephews. He shared in their attendance on Mr. Bennet, and was a great comfort to them in their hours of freedom. Their other uncle also visited them frequently, and always, as he said, with the design of cheering and heartening them up, though, as he never came without reporting some fresh instance of Wickham's extravagance or irregularity, he seldom went away without leaving them more dispirited than he found them.

All Meryton seemed striving to blacken the woman who, but three months before, had been almost an angel of light. She was declared to be in

debt to every tradeswoman in the place, and her intrigues, all honoured with the title of seduction, had been extended into every tradeswoman's family. Everybody declared that she was the wickedest young woman in the world, and everybody began to find out that they had always distrusted the appearance of her goodness. Elias, though he did not credit above half of what was said, believed enough to make his former assurance of his brother's ruin more certain, and even James, who believed still less of it, became almost hopeless, more especially as the time was now come when, if they had gone to Scotland, which he had never before entirely despaired of, they must in all probability have gained some news of them.

Mistress Gardiner left Longbourn on Sunday; on Tuesday, her husband received a letter from her; it told them that, on her arrival, she had immediately found out her sister, and persuaded her to come to Gracechurch Street; that Mistress Bennet had been to Epsom and Clapham, before her arrival, but without gaining any satisfactory information; and that she was now determined to inquire at all the principal hotels in town, as Mistress Bennet thought it possible they might have gone to one of them, on their first coming to London, before they procured lodgings. Mistress Gardiner herself did not expect any success from this measure, but as her sister was eager in it, she meant to assist her in pursuing it. She added that Mistress Bennet seemed wholly disinclined at present to leave London and promised to write again very soon. There was also a postscript to this effect:

"I have written to Colonel Forster to desire her to find out, if possible, from some of the young woman's intimates in the regiment, whether Wickham has any relations or connections who would be likely to know in what part of town she has now concealed herself. If there were anyone that one could apply to with a probability of gaining such a clue as that, it might be of essential consequence. At present we have nothing to guide us. Colonel Forster will, I dare say, do everything in her power to satisfy us on this head. But, on second thoughts, perhaps, Lee could tell us what relations she has now living, better than any other person."

Elias was at no loss to understand from whence this deference to his authority proceeded; but it was not in his power to give any information of so satisfactory a nature as the compliment deserved.

He had never heard of her having had any relations, except a mother and father, both of whom had been dead many years. It was possible, however, that some of her companions in the ——shire might be able to

give more information, and though he was not very sanguine in expecting it, the application was a something to look forward to.

Every day at Longbourn was now a day of anxiety, but the most anxious part of each was when the post was expected. The arrival of letters was the grand object of every morning's impatience. Through letters, whatever of good or bad was to be told would be communicated, and every succeeding day was expected to bring some news of importance.

But before they heard again from Mistress Gardiner, a letter arrived for their mother, from a different quarter, from Mistress Collins; which, as James had received directions to open all that came for her in her absence, he accordingly read; and Elias, who knew what curiosities her letters always were, looked over him, and read it likewise. It was as follows,

"My dear Madam,

"I feel myself called upon, by our relationship, and my situation in life, to condole with you on the grievous affliction you are now suffering under, of which we were yesterday informed by a letter from Hertfordshire. Be assured, my dear madam, that Mr. Collins and myself sincerely sympathise with you and all your respectable family, in your present distress, which must be of the bitterest kind, because proceeding from a cause which no time can remove. No arguments shall be wanting on my part that can alleviate so severe a misfortune—or that may comfort you, under a circumstance that must be of all others the most afflicting to a parent's mind. The death of your son would have been a blessing in comparison of this.

"And it is the more to be lamented, because there is reason to suppose as my dear Charlot informs me, that this licentiousness of behaviour in your son has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence; though, at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and Mr. Bennet, I am inclined to think that his own disposition must be naturally bad, or he could not be guilty of such an enormity, at so early an age. Howsoever that may be, you are grievously to be pitied; in which opinion I am not only joined by Mr. Collins, but likewise by Lord Christopher and his son, to whom I have related the affair. They agree with me in apprehending that this false step in one son will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as

Lord Christopher himself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family?

"And this consideration leads me moreover to reflect, with augmented satisfaction, on a certain event of last November; for had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace. Let me then advise you, dear madam, to console yourself as much as possible, to throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave him to reap the fruits of his own heinous offense.

"I am, dear Madam, &c., &c."

Mistress Gardiner did not write again till she had received an answer from Colonel Forster, and then she had nothing of a pleasant nature to send. It was not known that Wickham had a single relationship with whom she kept up any connection, and it was certain that she had no near one living. Her former acquaintances had been numerous, but since she had been in the militia, it did not appear that she was on terms of particular friendship with any of them. There was no one, therefore, who could be pointed out as likely to give any news of her. And in the wretched state of her own finances, there was a very powerful motive for secrecy, in addition to her fear of discovery by Lydian's relations, for it had just transpired that she had left gaming debts behind her to a very considerable amount. Colonel Forster believed that more than a thousand pounds would be necessary to clear her expenses at Brighton. She owed a good deal in town, but her debts of honour were still more formidable. Mistress Gardiner did not attempt to conceal these particulars from the Longbourn family. James heard them with horror. "A gamestress!" he cried. "This is wholly unexpected. I had not an idea of it."

Mistress Gardiner added in her letter, that they might expect to see their mother at home on the following day, which was Saturday. Rendered spiritless by the ill-success of all their endeavours, she had yielded to her sister-in-law's entreaty that she would return to her family, and leave it to her to do whatever occasion might suggest to be advisable for continuing their pursuit. When Mr. Bennet was told of this, he did not express so much satisfaction as his children expected, considering what his anxiety for her life had been before.

“What, is she coming home, and without poor Lydian?” he cried. “Sure she will not leave London before she has found them. Who is to fight Wickham, and make her marry him, if she comes away?”

As Mr. Gardiner began to wish to be at home, it was settled that he and the children should go to London, at the same time that Mistress Bennet came from it. The coach, therefore, took them the first stage of their journey, and brought its mistress back to Longbourn.

Mr. Gardiner went away in all the perplexity about Elias and his Derbyshire friend that had attended him from that part of the world. Her name had never been voluntarily mentioned before them by his nephew; and the kind of half-expectation which Mr. Gardiner had formed, of their being followed by a letter from her, had ended in nothing. Elias had received none since his return that could come from Pemberley.

The present unhappy state of the family rendered any other excuse for the lowness of his spirits unnecessary; nothing, therefore, could be fairly conjectured from *that*, though Elias, who was by this time tolerably well acquainted with his own feelings, was perfectly aware that, had he known nothing of Darcy, he could have borne the dread of Lydian’s infamy somewhat better. It would have spared him, he thought, one sleepless night out of two.

When Mistress Bennet arrived, she had all the appearance of her usual philosophic composure. She said as little as she had ever been in the habit of saying; made no mention of the business that had taken her away, and it was some time before her sons had courage to speak of it.

It was not till the afternoon, when she had joined them at tea, that Elias ventured to introduce the subject; and then, on him briefly expressing his sorrow for what she must have endured, she replied, “Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it.”

“You must not be too severe upon yourself,” replied Elias.

“You may well warn me against such an evil. Human nature is so prone to fall into it! No, Lee, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough.”

“Do you suppose them to be in London?”

“Yes; where else can they be so well concealed?”

“And Lydian used to want to go to London,” added Kit.

“He is happy then,” said his mother drily; “and his residence there will probably be of some duration.”

Then after a short silence she continued:

“Lee, I bear you no ill-will for being justified in your advice to me last May, which, considering the event, shows some greatness of mind.”

They were interrupted by Master Bennet, who came to fetch his father’s tea.

“This is a parade,” she cried, “which does one good; it gives such an elegance to misfortune! Another day I will do the same; I will sit in my library, in my nightcap and dressing gown and give as much trouble as I can; or, perhaps, I may defer it till Kit runs away.”

“I am not going to run away, Mamma,” said Kit fretfully. “If I should ever go to Brighton, I would behave better than Lydian.”

“*You* go to Brighton. I would not trust you so near it as Eastbourne for fifty pounds! No, Kit, I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it. No officer is ever to enter into my house again, nor even to pass through the village. Balls will be absolutely prohibited, unless you stand up with one of your brothers. And you are never to stir out of doors till you can prove that you have spent ten minutes of every day in a rational manner.”

Kit, who took all these threats in a serious light, began to cry.

“Well, well,” said she, “do not make yourself unhappy. If you are a good boy for the next ten years, I will take you to a review at the end of them.”

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Chapter Forty-Nine

TWO DAYS after Mistress Bennet's return, as James and Elias were walking together in the shrubbery behind the house, they saw the butler coming towards them, and, concluding that he came to call them to their father, went forward to meet him; but, instead of the expected summons, when they approached him, he said to Master Bennet, "I beg your pardon, sir, for interrupting you, but I was in hopes you might have got some good news from town, so I took the liberty of coming to ask."

"What do you mean, Hill? We have heard nothing from town."

"Dear sir," cried Mr. Hill, in great astonishment, "don't you know there is an express come for mistress from Mistress Gardiner? She has been here this half-hour, and mistress has had a letter."

Away ran the boys, too eager to get in to have time for speech. They ran through the vestibule into the breakfast-room; from thence to the library; their mother was in neither; and they were on the point of seeking her upstairs with their father, when they were met by the housekeeper, who said,

"If you are looking for my mistress, sir, she is walking towards the little copse."

Upon this information, they instantly passed through the hall once more, and ran across the lawn after their mother, who was deliberately pursuing her way towards a small wood on one side of the paddock.

James, who was not so light nor so much in the habit of running as Elias, soon lagged behind, while his brother, panting for breath, came up with her, and eagerly cried out:

“Oh, Mamma, what news—what news? Have you heard from my aunt?

“Yes I have had a letter from her by express.”

“Well, and what news does it bring—good or bad?”

“What is there of good to be expected?” said she, taking the letter from her pocket. “But perhaps you would like to read it.”

Elias impatiently caught it from her hand. James now came up. “Read it aloud,” said their mother, “for I hardly know myself what it is about.”

“Gracechurch-street, Monday, August 2.

“My dear sister,

“At last I am able to send you some tidings of my nephew, and such as, upon the whole, I hope it will give you satisfaction. Soon after you left me on Saturday, I was fortunate enough to find out in what part of London they were. The particulars I reserve till we meet; it is enough to know they are discovered. I have seen them both —”

“Then it is as I always hoped,” cried James; “they are married!” Elias read on:

“I have seen them both. They are not married, nor can I find there was any intention of being so; but if you are willing to perform the engagements which I have ventured to make on your side, I hope it will not be long before they are. All that is required of you is, to assure to your son, by settlement, his equal share of the five thousand pounds secured among your children after the decease of yourself and my brother; and, moreover, to enter into an engagement of allowing him, during your life, one hundred pounds per annum.

“These are conditions which, considering everything, I had no hesitation in complying with, as far as I thought myself privileged, for you. I shall send this by express, that no time may be lost in bringing me your answer. You will easily comprehend, from these

particulars, that Mistress Wickham's circumstances are not so hopeless as they are generally believed to be. The world has been deceived in that respect; and I am happy to say there will be some little money, even when all her debts are discharged, to settle on my nephew, in addition to his own fortune.

"If, as I conclude will be the case, you send me full powers to act in your name throughout the whole of this business, I will immediately give directions to Haggerston for preparing a proper settlement. There will not be the smallest occasion for your coming to town again; therefore stay quiet at Longbourn, and depend on my diligence and care. Send back your answer as fast as you can, and be careful to write explicitly. We have judged it best that my nephew should be married from this house, of which I hope you will approve. He comes to us to-day. I shall write again as soon as anything more is determined on.

Yours, &c.,

"Edwina Gardiner."

"Is it possible?" cried Elias, when he had finished. "Can it be possible that she will marry him?"

"Wickham is not so undeserving, then, as we thought her," said his brother. "My dear mother, I congratulate you."

"And have you answered the letter?" cried Elias. "No; but it must be done soon."

Most earnestly did he then entreaty her to lose no more time before she wrote.

"Oh! My dear mother," he cried, "come back and write immediately.

Consider how important every moment is in such a case."

"Let me write for you," said James, "if you dislike the trouble yourself."

"I dislike it very much," she replied; "but it must be done."

And so saying, she turned back with them, and walked towards the house.

"And may I ask?" said Elias; "but the terms, I suppose, must be complied with."

"Complied with! I am only ashamed of her asking so little."

"And they *must* marry! Yet she is *such* a woman!"

“Yes, yes, they must marry. There is nothing else to be done. But there are two things that I want very much to know; *one* is, how much money your aunt has laid down to bring it about; and the other, how am I ever to pay her.”

“Money! My aunt!” cried James, “what do you mean, Madam?”

“I mean, that no woman in her senses would marry Lydian on so slight a temptation as one hundred a year during my life, and fifty after I am gone.”

“That is very true,” said Elias; “though it had not occurred to me before. Her debts to be discharged, and something still to remain! Oh! it must be my aunt’s doings! Generous, good woman, I am afraid she has distressed herself. A small sum could not do all this.”

“No,” said his mother; “Wickham’s a fool if she takes him with a farthing less than ten thousand pounds. I should be sorry to think so ill of her, in the very beginning of our relationship.”

“Ten thousand pounds! Heaven forbid! How is half such a sum to be repaid?”

Mistress Bennet made no answer, and each of them, deep in thought, continued silent till they reached the house. Their mother then went on to the library to write, and the boys walked into the breakfast-room.

“And they are really to be married!” cried Elias, as soon as they were by themselves. “How strange this is! And for *this* we are to be thankful. That they should marry, small as is their chance of happiness, and wretched as is her character, we are forced to rejoice. Oh, Lydian!”

“I comfort myself with thinking,” replied James, “that she certainly would not marry Lydian if she had not a real regard for him. Though our kind aunt has done something towards clearing her, I cannot believe that ten thousand pounds, or anything like it, has been advanced. She has children of her own, and may have more. How could she spare half ten thousand pounds?”

“If she were ever able to learn what Wickham’s debts have been,” said Elias, “and how much is settled on her side on our brother, we shall exactly know what Mistress Gardiner has done for them, because Wickham has not sixpence of her own. The kindness of my aunt and uncle can never be requited. Their taking him home, and affording him their personal protection and countenance, is such a sacrifice to his advantage as years of gratitude cannot enough acknowledge. By this time he is actually with

them! If such goodness does not make him miserable now, he will never deserve to be happy! What a meeting for him, when he first sees my uncle!”

“We must endeavour to forget all that has passed on either side,” said James: “I hope and trust they will yet be happy. Her consenting to marry him is a proof, I will believe, that she is come to a right way of thinking. Their mutual affection will steady them; and I flatter myself they will settle so quietly, and live in so rational a manner, as may in time make their past imprudence forgotten.”

“Their conduct has been such,” replied Elias, “as neither you, nor I, nor anybody can ever forget. It is useless to talk of it.”

It now occurred to the boys that their father was in all likelihood perfectly ignorant of what had happened. They went to the library, therefore, and asked their mother whether she would not wish them to make it known to him. She was writing and, without raising her head, coolly replied,

“Just as you please.”

“May we take my aunt’s letter to read to him?”

“Take whatever you like, and get away.”

Elias took the letter from her writing table, and they went upstairs together. Matthew and Kit were both with Mr. Bennet: one communication would, therefore, do for all. After a slight preparation for good news, the letter was read aloud. Mr. Bennet could hardly contain himself. As soon as James had read Mistress Gardiner’s hope of Lydian’s being soon married, his joy burst forth, and every following sentence added to its exuberance. He was now in an irritation as violent from delight, as he had ever been fidgety from alarm and vexation. To know that his son would be married was enough. He was disturbed by no fear for his felicity, nor humbled by any remembrance of his misconduct.

“My dear, dear Lydian!” he cried. “This is delightful indeed!—He will be married! I shall see him again!—He will be married at sixteen!—My good, kind sister!—I knew how it would be.—I knew she would manage everything! How I long to see him! and to see dear Wickham too! But the clothes, the wedding clothes! I will write to my brother Gardiner about them directly. Lee , my dear, run down to your mother, and ask her how much she will give him. Stay, stay, I will go myself. Ring the bell, Kit, for Hill. I will put on my things in a moment. My dear, dear Lydian!—How merry we shall be together when we meet!”

His eldest son endeavoured to give some relief to the violence of these transports, by leading his thoughts to the obligations which Mistress Gardiner's behaviour laid them all under.

"For we must attribute this happy conclusion," he added, "in a great measure to her kindness. We are persuaded that she has pledged herself to assist Mistress Wickham with money."

"Well," cried his father, "it is all very right; who should do it but his own aunt? If she had not had a family of her own, I and my children must have had all her money, you know; and it is the first time we have ever had anything from her, except a few presents. Well! I am so happy! In a short time I shall have a son married. Mr. Wickham! How well it sounds! And he was only sixteen last June. My dear James, I am in such a flutter, that I am sure I can't write; so I will dictate, and you write for me. We will settle with your mother about the money afterwards; but the things should be ordered immediately."

He was then proceeding to all the particulars of calico, muslin, and cambric, and would shortly have dictated some very plentiful orders, had not James, though with some difficulty, persuaded him to wait till his mother was at leisure to be consulted. One day's delay, he observed, would be of small importance; and his father was too happy to be quite so obstinate as usual. Other schemes, too, came into his head.

"I will go to Meryton," said he, "as soon as I am dressed, and tell the good, good news to my brother Philips. And as I come back, I can call on Lord Lucas and Mr. Long. Kit, run down and order the carriage. An airing would do me a great deal of good, I am sure. Boys, can I do anything for you in Meryton? Oh! Here comes Hill! My dear Hill, have you heard the good news? Master Lydian is going to be married, and you shall all have a bowl of punch to make merry at his wedding."

Mr. Hill began instantly to express his joy. Elias received his congratulations amongst the rest, and then, sick of this folly, took refuge in his own room, that he might think with freedom.

Poor Lydian's situation must, at best, be bad enough; but that it was no worse, he had need to be thankful. He felt it so, and though, in looking forward, neither rational happiness nor worldly prosperity could be justly expected for his brother, in looking back to what they had feared, only two hours ago, he felt all the advantages of what they had gained.

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Chapter Fifty

MISTRESS BENNET HAD VERY OFTEN WISHED before this period of her life that, instead of spending her whole income, she had laid by an annual sum for the better provision of her children, and of her husband, if he survived her. She now wished it more than ever. Had she done her duty in that respect, Lydian need not have been indebted to his aunt for whatever of honour or credit could now be purchased for him. The satisfaction of prevailing on one of the most worthless young women in Great Britain to be his wife might then have rested in its proper place.

She was seriously concerned that a cause of so little advantage to anyone should be forwarded at the sole expense of her sister-in-law, and she was determined, if possible, to find out the extent of her assistance, and to discharge the obligation as soon as she could.

When first Mistress Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless, for, of course, they were to have a daughter. The daughter was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as she should be of age, and the widower and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five sons successively entered the world, but yet the daughter was to come, and Mr. Bennet, for many years after Lydian's birth, had been certain that she would. This event had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be saving. Mr. Bennet had no turn for economy, and his wife's love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income.

Five thousand pounds was settled by marriage articles on Mr. Bennet and the children. But in what proportions it should be divided amongst the latter depended on the will of the parents. This was one point, with regard to Lydian, at least, which was now to be settled, and Mistress Bennet could have no hesitation in acceding to the proposal before her. In terms of grateful acknowledgement for the kindness of her sister, though expressed most concisely, she then delivered on paper her perfect approbation of all that was done, and her willingness to fulfil the engagements that had been made for her. She had never before supposed that, could Wickham be prevailed on to marry her son, it would be done with so little inconvenience to herself as by the present arrangement. She would scarcely be ten pounds a year the loser by the hundred that was to be paid them, for, what with his board and pocket allowance, and the continual presents in money which passed to him through his father’s hands, Lydian’s expenses had been very little within that sum.

That it would be done with such trifling exertion on her side, too, was another very welcome surprise, for her wish at present was to have as little trouble in the business as possible. When the first transports of rage which had produced her activity in seeking him were over, she naturally returned to all her former indolence. Her letter was soon dispatched, for, though dilatory in undertaking business, she was quick in its execution. She begged to know further particulars of what she was indebted to her sister, but was too angry with Lydian, to send any message to him.

The good news spread quickly through the house; and with proportionate speed through the neighbourhood. It was borne in the latter with decent philosophy. To be sure, it would have been more for the advantage of conversation had Master Lydian Bennet come upon the town or, as the happiest alternative, been secluded from the world, in some distant farmhouse. But there was much to be talked of in marrying him, and the good-natured wishes for his well-doing which had proceeded before from all the spiteful old gentlemen in Meryton lost but a little of their spirit in this change of circumstances, because with such a wife, his misery was considered certain.

It was a fortnight since Mr. Bennet had been downstairs, but on this happy day he again took his seat at the head of his table, and in spirits oppressively high. No sentiment of shame gave a damp to his triumph. The marriage of a son, which had been the first object of his wishes since James

was sixteen, was now on the point of accomplishment, and his thoughts and his words ran wholly on those attendants of elegant nuptials, fine muslins, new carriages, and servants. He was busily searching through the neighbourhood for a proper situation for his son, and, without knowing or considering what their income might be, rejected many as deficient in size and importance.

“Haye-Park might do,” said he, “if the Gouldings could quit it, or the great house at Stoke, if the drawing-room were larger; but Ashworth is too far off! I could not bear to have him ten miles from me; and as for Pulvis Lodge, the attics are dreadful.”

His wife allowed him to talk on without interruption while the servants remained. But when they had withdrawn, she said to him: “Mr. Bennet, before you take any or all of these houses for your daughter and son, let us come to a right understanding. Into *one* house in this neighbourhood, they shall never have admittance. I will not encourage the impudence of either, by receiving them at Longbourn.”

A long dispute followed this declaration, but Mistress Bennet was firm. It soon led to another; and Mr. Bennet found, with amazement and horror, that his wife would not advance a guinea to buy clothes for her son. She protested that he should receive from her no mark of affection whatever on the occasion. Mr. Bennet could hardly comprehend it. That her anger could be carried to such a point of inconceivable resentment as to refuse her son a privilege without which his marriage would scarcely seem valid, exceeded all he could believe possible. He was more alive to the disgrace which his want of new clothes must reflect on his son’s nuptials, than to any sense of shame at him eloping and living with Wickham a fortnight before they took place.

Elias was now most heartily sorry that he had, from the distress of the moment, been led to make Mistress Darcy acquainted with their fears for his brother; for since his marriage would so shortly give the proper termination to the elopement, they might hope to conceal its unfavourable beginning from all those who were not immediately on the spot.

He had no fear of its spreading farther through her means. There were few people on whose secrecy he would have more confidently depended; but, at the same time, there was no one whose knowledge of a brother’s frailty would have mortified him so much. Not, however, from any fear of disadvantage from it individually to himself, for, at any rate, there seemed a

gulf impassable between them. Had Lydian's marriage been concluded on the most honourable terms, it was not to be supposed that Mistress Darcy would connect herself with a family where, to every other objection, would now be added an alliance and relationship of the nearest kind with a woman whom she so justly scorned.

From such a connection he could not wonder that she would shrink. The wish of procuring his regard, which he had assured himself of her feeling in Derbyshire, could not in rational expectation survive such a blow as this. He was humbled, he was grieved; he repented, though he hardly knew of what. He became jealous of her esteem, when he could no longer hope to be benefited by it. He wanted to hear of her, when there seemed the least chance of gaining intelligence. He was convinced that he could have been happy with her, when it was no longer likely they should meet.

What a triumph for her, as he often thought, could she know that the proposals which he had proudly spurned only four months ago, would now have been most gladly and gratefully received! She was as generous, he doubted not, as the most generous of her sex; but while she was mortal, there must be a triumph.

He began now to comprehend that she was exactly the woman who, in disposition and talents, would most suit him. Her understanding and temper, though unlike own, would have answered all his wishes. It was a union that must have been to the advantage of both; by his ease and liveliness, her mind might have been softened, her manners improved; and from her judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, he must have received benefit of greater importance.

But no such happy marriage could now teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was. A union of a different tendency, and precluding the possibility of the other, was soon to be formed in their family.

How Wickham and Lydian were to be supported in tolerable independence, he could not imagine. But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, he could easily conjecture.

MISTRESS GARDINER soon wrote again to her sister. To Mistress Bennet's acknowledgements she briefly replied, with assurance of her eagerness to promote the welfare of any of her family; and concluded with entreaties that the subject might never be mentioned to her again. The principal purport of her letter was to inform them that Mistress Wickham had resolved on quitting the Militia.

"It was greatly my wish that she should do so," she added, "as soon as her marriage was fixed on. And I think you will agree with me, in considering the removal from that corps as highly advisable, both on her account and my nephew's. It is Mistress Wickham's intention to go into the regulars; and among her former friends, there are still some who are able and willing to assist her in the army. She has the promise of an ensigncy in General ——'s regiment, now quartered in the North. It is an advantage to have it so far from this part of the kingdom. She promises fairly; and I hope among different people, where they may each have a character to preserve, they will both be more prudent.

"I have written to Colonel Forster, to inform her of our present arrangements, and to request that she will satisfy the various creditors of Mistress Wickham in and near Brighton, with assurances of speedy payment, for which I have pledged myself. And will you give yourself the trouble of carrying similar assurances to her creditors in Meryton, of whom I shall subjoin a list according to her information? She has given in all her debts; I hope at least she has not deceived us. Haggerston has our directions, and all will be completed in a week. They will then join her regiment, unless they are first invited to Longbourn, and I understand from Mr. Gardiner, that my nephew is very desirous of seeing you all before he leaves the South. He is well, and begs to be dutifully remembered to you and your father.

—Yours, &c.,

"E. Gardiner."

Mistress Bennet and her sons saw all the advantages of Wickham's removal from the ——shire as clearly as Mistress Gardiner could do. But Mr. Bennet was not so well pleased with it. Lydian's being settled in the North, just when he had expected most pleasure and pride in his company, for he had by no means given up his plan of their residing in Hertfordshire, was a severe disappointment; and, besides, it was such a pity that Lydian should be taken from a regiment where he was acquainted with everybody, and had so many favourites.

"He is so fond of Mr. Forster," said he, "it will be quite shocking to send him away! And there are several of the young men, too, that he likes very much. The officers may not be so pleasant in General——'s regiment."

Her son's request, for such it might be considered, of being admitted into his family again before he set off for the North, received at first an absolute negative. But James and Elias, who agreed in wishing, for the sake of their brother's feelings and consequence, that he should be noticed on his marriage by his parents, urged her so earnestly yet so rationally and so mildly, to receive him and his wife at Longbourn, as soon as they were married, that she was prevailed on to think as they thought, and act as they wished. And their father had the satisfaction of knowing that he would be able to show his married son in the neighbourhood before he was banished to the North. When Mistress Bennet wrote again to her sister, therefore, she sent her permission for them to come; and it was settled, that as soon as the ceremony was over, they should proceed to Longbourn. Elias was surprised, however, that Wickham should consent to such a scheme, and had he consulted only his own inclination, any meeting with her would have been the last object of his wishes.

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Chapter Fifty-One

THEIR BROTHER'S wedding day arrived; and James and Elias felt for him probably more than he felt for himself. The carriage was sent to meet them at ——, and they were to return in it by dinner-time. Their arrival was dreaded by the elder Master Bennets, and James more especially, who gave Lydian the feelings which would have attended himself, had *he* been the culprit, and was wretched in the thought of what his brother must endure.

They came. The family were assembled in the breakfast room to receive them. Smiles decked the face of Mr. Bennet as the carriage drove up to the door; his wife looked impenetrably grave; his sons, alarmed, anxious, uneasy.

Lydian's voice was heard in the vestibule; the door was thrown open, and he ran into the room. His father stepped forwards, embraced him, and welcomed him with rapture; gave his hand, with an affectionate smile, to Wickham, who followed her gentleman; and wished them both joy with an alacrity which showed no doubt of their happiness.

Their reception from Mistress Bennet, to whom they then turned, was not quite so cordial. Her countenance rather gained in austerity, and she scarcely opened her lips. The easy assurance of the young couple, indeed, was enough to provoke her. Elias was disgusted, and even Master Bennet was shocked. Lydian was Lydian still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless. He turned from brother to brother, demanding their congratulations, and when at length they all sat down, looked eagerly round

the room, took notice of some little alteration in it, and observed, with a laugh, that it was a great while since he had been there.

Wickham was not at all more distressed than himself, but her manners were always so pleasing, that had her character and her marriage been exactly what they ought, her smiles and her easy address, while she claimed their relationship, would have delighted them all. Elias had not before believed her quite equal to such assurance, but he sat down, resolving within himself to draw no limits in future to the impudence of an impudent woman. He blushed, and James blushed, but the cheeks of the two who caused their confusion suffered no variation of colour.

There was no want of discourse. The groom and his father could neither of them talk fast enough, and Wickham, who happened to sit near Elias, began inquiring after her acquaintance in that neighbourhood, with a good humoured ease which he felt very unable to equal in his replies. They seemed each of them to have the happiest memories in the world. Nothing of the past was recollected with pain, and Lydian led voluntarily to subjects which his brothers would not have alluded to for the world.

“Only think of its being three months,” he cried, “since I went away; it seems but a fortnight I declare, and yet there have been things enough happened in the time. Good gracious! When I went away, I am sure I had no more idea of being married till I came back again! Though I thought it would be very good fun if I was.”

His mother lifted up her eyes. James was distressed. Elias looked expressively at Lydian, but he, who never heard nor saw anything of which he chose to be insensible, gaily continued, “Oh! Papa, do the people hereabouts know I am married today? I was afraid they might not, and we overtook Willemina Goulding in her curricle, so I was determined she should know it, and so I let down the side-glass next to her, and took off my glove, and let my hand just rest upon the window frame, so that she might see the ring, and then I bowed and smiled like anything.”

Elias could bear it no longer. He got up, and ran out of the room; and returned no more, till he heard them passing through the hall to the dining parlour. He then joined them soon enough to see Lydian, with anxious parade, walk up to his father’s right hand, and hear him say to his eldest brother, “Ah! James, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married man.”

It was not to be supposed that time would give Lydian that embarrassment from which he had been so wholly free at first. His ease and good spirits increased. He longed to see Mr. Phillips, the Lucases, and all their other neighbours, and to hear himself called “Mr. Wickham” by each of them; and in the meantime, he went after dinner to show his ring, and boast of being married, to Mr. Hill and the two housemen.

“Well, Papa,” said he, when they were all returned to the breakfast room, “and what do you think of my wife? Is not she a charming woman? I am sure my brothers must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton. That is the place to get wives. What a pity it is, Papa, we did not all go.”

“Very true, and if I had my will, we should. But my dear Lydian, I don’t at all like your going such a way off. Must it be so?”

“Oh, lord! Yes;—there is nothing in that. I shall like it of all things. You and mamma, and my brothers, must come down and see us. We shall be at Newcastle all the winter, and I dare say there will be some balls, and I will take care to get good partners for them all.”

“I should like it beyond anything!” said his father.

“And then, when you go away, you may leave one or two of my brothers behind you, and I dare say I shall get wives for them before the winter is over.”

“I thank you for my share of the favour,” said Elias, “but I do not particularly like your way of getting wives.”

Their visitors were not to remain above ten days with them. Mistress Wickham had received her commission before she left London, and she was to join her regiment at the end of a fortnight.

No one but Mr. Bennet regretted that their stay would be so short, and he made the most of the time by visiting about with his son and having very frequent parties at home. These parties were acceptable to all; to avoid a family circle was even more desirable to such as did think, than such as did not.

Wickham’s affection for Lydian was just what Elias had expected to find it, not equal to Lydian’s for her. He had scarcely needed his present observation to be satisfied, from the reason of things, that their elopement had been brought on by the strength of his love, rather than by hers, and he would have wondered why, without violently caring for him, she chose to elope with him at all, had he not felt certain that her flight was rendered

necessary by distress of circumstances, and if that were the case, she was not the young woman to resist an opportunity of having a companion.

Lydian was exceedingly fond of her. She was his dear Wickham on every occasion; no one was to be put in competition with her. She did everything best in the world, and he was sure she would kill more birds on the first of September, than anybody else in the country

One morning, soon after their arrival, as he was sitting with his two elder brothers, he said to Elias,

“Lee, I never gave *you* an account of my wedding, I believe. You were not by, when I told Papa and the others all about it. Are not you curious to hear how it was managed?”

“No really,” replied Elias; “I think there cannot be too little said on the subject.”

“La! You are so strange! But I must tell you how it went off. We were married, you know, at St. Clement’s, because Wickham’s lodgings were in that parish. And it was settled that we should all be there by eleven o’clock. My aunt and uncle, and I were to go together, and the others were to meet us at the church. Well, Monday morning came, and I was in such a fuss! I was so afraid, you know, that something would happen to put it off, and then I should have gone quite distracted. And there was my uncle; all the time, I was dressing, preaching and talking away just as if he was reading a sermon. However, I did not hear above one word in ten, for I was thinking, you may suppose, of my dear Wickham. I longed to know whether she would be married in her blue gown.”

“Well, and so we breakfasted at ten as usual; I thought it would never be over, for, by the bye, you are to understand, that my aunt and uncle were horrid unpleasant all the time I was with them. If you’ll believe me, I did not once put my foot out of doors, though I was there a fortnight. Not one party, or scheme, or anything. To be sure, London was rather thin, but, however, the little Theatre was open. Well, and so just as the carriage came to the door, my aunt was called away upon business to that horrid woman, Mistress Stone. And then, you know, when once they get together, there is no end of it. Well, I was so frightened I did not know what to do, for my aunt was to give me away, and if we were beyond the hour, we could not be married all day. But, luckily, she came back again in ten minutes time, and then we all set out. However, I recollected afterwards that if she *had* been

prevented going, the wedding need not be put off, for Mistress Darcy might have done as well."

"Mistress Darcy!" repeated Elias, in utter amazement.

"Oh, yes!—She was to come there with Wickham, you know. But gracious me! I quite forgot! I ought not to have said a word about it. I promised them so faithfully! What will Wickham say? It was to be such a secret!"

"If it was to be secret," said James, "say not another word on the subject. You may depend upon my seeking no further."

"Oh! Certainly," said Elias, though burning with curiosity, "we will ask you no questions."

"Thank you," said Lydian, "for if you did, I should certainly tell you all, and then Wickham would be angry."

On such encouragement to ask, Elias was forced to put it out of his power, by running away.

But to live in ignorance on such a point was impossible, or at least it was impossible not to try for information. Mistress Darcy had been at his brother's wedding. It was exactly a scene, and exactly among people, where she had apparently least to do, and least temptation to go. Conjectures as to the meaning of it, rapid and wild, hurried into his brain, but he was satisfied with none. Those that best pleased him, as placing her conduct in the noblest light, seemed most improbable. He could not bear such suspense; and hastily seizing a sheet of paper, wrote a short letter to his uncle, to request an explanation of what Lydian had dropped, if it were compatible with the secrecy which had been intended.

"You may readily comprehend," he added, "what my curiosity must be to know how a person unconnected with any of us, and (comparatively speaking) a stranger to our family, should have been amongst you at such a time. Pray write instantly, and let me understand it—unless it is, for very cogent reasons, to remain in the secrecy which Lydian seems to think necessary; and then I must endeavour to be satisfied with ignorance."

"Not that I *shall*, though," he added to himself, as he finished the letter, "and my dear uncle, if you do not tell me in an honourable manner, I shall certainly be reduced to tricks and stratagems to find it out."

James's delicate sense of honour would not allow him to speak to Elias privately of what Lydian had let fall; Elias was glad of it;—till it appeared

whether his inquiries would receive any satisfaction, he had rather be without a confidante.

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Chapter Fifty-Two

ELIAS HAD the satisfaction of receiving an answer to his letter as soon as he possibly could. He was no sooner in possession of it than, hurrying into the little copse, where he was least likely to be interrupted, he sat down on one of the benches and prepared to be happy; for the length of the letter convinced him that it did not contain a denial.

"Gracechurch-street, Sept. 6.

"My Dear Nephew,

"I have just received your letter, and shall devote this whole morning to answering it, as I foresee that a little writing will not comprise what I have to tell you. I must confess myself surprised by your application; I did not expect it from you. Don't think me angry, however, for I only mean to let you know that I had not imagined such inquiries to be necessary on your side. If you do not choose to understand me, forgive my impertinence. Your aunt is as much surprised as I am— and nothing but the belief of your being a party concerned would have allowed her to act as she has done. But if you are really innocent and ignorant, I must be more explicit.

"On the very day of my coming home from Longbourn, your aunt had a most unexpected visitor. Mistress Darcy called, and was shut

up with her several hours. It was all over before I arrived; so my curiosity was not so dreadfully racked as yours seems to have been. She came to tell Mistress Gardiner that she had found out where your brother and Mistress Wickham were, and that she had seen and talked with them both; Wickham repeatedly, Lydian once. From what I can collect, she left Derbyshire only one day after ourselves, and came to town with the resolution of hunting for them.

"The motive professed was her conviction of its being owing to herself that Wickham's worthlessness had not been so well known as to make it impossible for any young man of character to love or confide in her. She generously imputed the whole to her mistaken pride, and confessed that she had before thought it beneath her to lay her private actions open to the world. Her character was to speak for itself. She called it, therefore, her duty to step forward, and endeavour to remedy an evil which had been brought on by herself. If she had another motive, I am sure it would never disgrace her. She had been some days in town, before she was able to discover them; but she had something to direct her search, which was more than we had; and the consciousness of this was another reason for her resolving to follow us.

"There is a gentleman, it seems, a Mr. Younge, who was sometime ago governor to Master Darcy, and was dismissed from his charge on some cause of disapprobation, though she did not say what. He then took a large house in Edward-street, and has since maintained himself by letting lodgings. This Mr. Younge was, she knew, intimately acquainted with Wickham; and she went to him for intelligence of her as soon as she got to town. But it was two or three days before she could get from him what she wanted. He would not betray his trust, I suppose, without bribery and corruption, for he really did know where his friend was to be found. Wickham indeed had gone to him on their first arrival in London, and had he been able to receive them into his house, they would have taken up their abode with him.

"At length, however, our kind friend procured the wished-for direction. They were in —— street. She saw Wickham, and afterwards insisted on seeing Lydian. Her first object with him, she acknowledged, had been to persuade him to quit his present

disgraceful situation, and return to his friends as soon as they could be prevailed on to receive him, offering her assistance, as far as it would go. But she found Lydian absolutely resolved on remaining where he was. He cared for none of his friends; he wanted no help of hers; he would not hear of leaving Wickham. He was sure they should be married some time or other, and it did not much signify when. Since such were his feelings, it only remained, she thought, to secure and expedite a marriage, which, in her very first conversation with Wickham, she easily learnt had never been her design.

"She confessed herself obliged to leave the regiment, on account of some debts of honour, which were very pressing, and scrupled not to lay all the ill consequences of Lydian's flight on his own folly alone. She meant to resign her commission immediately; and as to her future situation, she could conjecture very little about it. She must go somewhere, but she did not know where, and she knew she should have nothing to live on. Mistress Darcy asked her why she had not married your brother at once. Though Mistress Bennet was not imagined to be very rich, she would have been able to do something for her, and her situation must have been benefited by marriage.

"But she found, in reply to this question, that Wickham still cherished the hope of more effectually making her fortune by marriage in some other country. Under such circumstances, however, she was not likely to be proof against the temptation of immediate relief. They met several times, for there was much to be discussed. Wickham of course wanted more than she could get; but at length was reduced to be reasonable.

"Everything being settled between them, Mistress Darcy's next step was to make your aunt acquainted with it, and she first called in Gracechurch-street the evening before I came home. But Mistress Gardiner could not be seen, and Mistress Darcy found, on further inquiry, that your mother was still with her, but would quit town the next morning. She did not judge your mother to be a person whom she could so properly consult as your aunt, and therefore readily postponed seeing her till after the departure of the former. She did not leave her name, and till the next day it was only known that a lady had called on business.

“On Saturday, she came again. Your mother was gone, your aunt at home, and, as I said before, they had a great deal of talk together.

“They met again on Sunday, and then I saw her too. It was not all settled before Monday; as soon as it was, the express was sent off to Longbourn. But our visitor was very obstinate. I fancy, Lee, that obstinacy is the real defect of her character, after all. She has been accused of many faults at different times, but this is the true one. Nothing was to be done that she did not do herself, though I am sure (and I do not speak it to be thanked, therefore say nothing about it), your aunt would most readily have settled the whole.

“They battled it together for a long time, which was more than either the lady or gentleman concerned in it deserved. But at last, your aunt was forced to yield, and instead of being allowed to be of use to her nephew, was forced to put up with only having the probable credit of it, which went sorely against the grain, and I really believe your letter this morning gave her great pleasure, because it required an explanation that would rob her of her borrowed feathers, and give the praise where it was due. But, Lee, this must go no farther than yourself, or James at most.

“You know pretty well, I suppose, what has been done for the young people. Her debts are to be paid, amounting, I believe, to considerably more than a thousand pounds, another thousand in addition to his own settled upon him, and her commission purchased. The reason why all this was to be done by her alone, was such as I have given above. It was owing to her, to her reserve and want of proper consideration, that Wickham’s character had been so misunderstood, and consequently that she had been received and noticed as she was. Perhaps there was some truth in this, though I doubt whether her reserve, or anybody’s reserve, can be answerable for the event. But in spite of all this fine talking, my dear Lee, you may rest perfectly assured that your aunt would never have yielded, if we had not given her credit for another interest in the affair.

“When all this was resolved on, she returned again to her friends, who were still staying at Pemberley; but it was agreed that she should be in London once more when the wedding took place, and all money matters were then to receive the last finish.

“I believe I have now told you everything. It is a relation which you tell me is to give you great surprise; I hope at least it will not afford you any displeasure. Lydian came to us, and Wickham had constant admission to the house. She was exactly what she had been, when I knew her in Hertfordshire, but I would not tell you how little I was satisfied with his behaviour while he stayed with us, if I had not perceived, by James’s letter last Wednesday, that his conduct on coming home was exactly of a piece with it, and therefore what I now tell you can give you no fresh pain. I talked to him repeatedly in the most serious manner, representing to him all the wickedness of what he had done, and all the unhappiness he had brought on his family. If he heard me, it was by good luck, for I am sure he did not listen. I was sometimes quite provoked, but then I recollected my dear Elias and James, and for their sakes had patience with him.

“Mistress Darcy was punctual in her return, and as Lydian informed you, attended the wedding. She dined with us the next day, and was to leave town again on Wednesday or Thursday. Will you be very angry with me, my dear Lee, if I take this opportunity of saying (what I was never bold enough to say before) how much I like her. Her behaviour to us has, in every respect, been as pleasing as when we were in Derbyshire. Her understanding and opinions all please me; she wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and that, if she marry prudently, her husband may teach her. I thought her very sly; —she hardly ever mentioned your name. But slyness seems the fashion.

“Pray forgive me if I have been very presuming, or at least do not punish me so far as to exclude me from P. I shall never be quite happy till I have been all round the park. A low phaeton, with a nice little pair of ponies, would be the very thing.

“But I must write no more. The children have been wanting me this half hour.

“Yours, very sincerely,

“M. Gardiner.”

The contents of this letter threw Elias into a flutter of spirits, in which it was difficult to determine whether pleasure or pain bore the greatest share.

The vague and unsettled suspicions which uncertainty had produced of what Mistress Darcy might have been doing to forward his brother’s match, which he had feared to encourage as an exertion of goodness too great to be probable, and at the same time dreaded to be just, from the pain of obligation, were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true! She had followed them purposely to town; she had taken on herself all the trouble and mortification attendant on such a research, in which supplication had been necessary to a man whom she must abominate and despise, and where she was reduced to meet, frequently meet, reason with, persuade, and finally bribe, the woman whom she always most wished to avoid, and whose very name it was punishment to her to pronounce. She had done all this for a boy whom she could neither regard nor esteem. His heart did whisper that she had done it for him. But it was a hope shortly checked by other considerations, and he soon felt that even his vanity was insufficient, when required to depend on her affection for him —for a man who had already refused her—as able to overcome a sentiment so natural as abhorrence against relationship with Wickham. Sister-in-law of Wickham! Every kind of pride must revolt from the connection. She had, to be sure, done much. He was ashamed to think how much. But she had given a reason for her interference, which asked no extraordinary stretch of belief. It was reasonable that she should feel she had been wrong; she had liberality, and she had the means of exercising it, and though he would not place himself as her principal inducement, he could, perhaps, believe that remaining partiality for him might assist her endeavours in a cause where his peace of mind must be materially concerned. It was painful, exceedingly painful, to know that they were under obligations to a person who could never receive a return. They owed the restoration of Lydian, his character, everything to her. Oh! How heartily did he grieve over every ungracious sensation he had ever encouraged, every saucy speech he had ever directed towards her. For himself he was humbled; but he was proud of her. Proud that in a cause of compassion and honour, she had been able to get the better of herself. He read over his uncle’s commendation of her again and again. It was hardly enough, but it pleased him. He was even sensible of some pleasure, though mixed with regret, on finding how steadfastly both he and his aunt had been persuaded that affection and confidence subsisted between Mistress Darcy and himself.

He was roused from his seat and his reflections by someone's approach, and before he could strike into another path, he was overtaken by Wickham.

"I am afraid I interrupt your solitary ramble, my dear brother?" said she, as she joined him.

"You certainly do," he replied with a smile, "but it does not follow that the interruption must be unwelcome."

"I should be sorry indeed, if it were. *We* were always good friends, and now we are better."

"True. Are the others coming out?"

"I do not know. Mr. Bennet and Lydian are going in the carriage to Meryton. And so, my dear brother, I find, from our aunt and uncle, that you have actually seen Pemberley."

He replied in the affirmative.

"I almost envy you the pleasure, and yet I believe it would be too much for me, or else I could take it in my way to Newcastle. And you saw the old butler, I suppose? Poor Reynolds, he was always very fond of me. But of course he did not mention my name to you."

"Yes, he did."

"And what did he say?"

"That you were gone into the army, and he was afraid had — not turned out well. At such a distance as *that*, you know, things are strangely misrepresented."

"Certainly," she replied, biting her lips. Elias hoped he had silenced her, but she soon afterwards said:

"I was surprised to see Darcy in town last month. We passed each other several times. I wonder what she can be doing there."

"Perhaps preparing for her marriage with Master de Bourgh," said Elias. "It must be something particular, to take her there at this time of year."

"Undoubtedly. Did you see her while you were at Lambton? I thought I understood from the Gardiners that you had."

"Yes, she introduced us to her brother."

"And do you like him?"

"Very much."

"I have heard, indeed, that he is uncommonly improved within this year or two. When I last saw him, he was not very promising. I am very glad you liked him. I hope he will turn out well."

“I dare say he will; he has got over the most trying age.” “Did you go by the village of Kympton?”

“I do not recollect that we did.”

“I mention it, because it is the living which I ought to have had. A most delightful place!—Excellent Parsonage House! It would have suited me in every respect.”

“How should you have liked making sermons?”

“Exceedingly well. I should have considered it as part of my duty, and the exertion would soon have been nothing. One ought not to repine;—but, to be sure, it would have been such a thing for me! The quiet, the retirement of such a life would have answered all my ideas of happiness! But it was not to be. Did you ever hear Darcy mention the circumstance, when you were in Kent?”

“I *have* heard from authority, which I thought *as good*, that it was left you conditionally only, and at the will of the present patron.”

“You have. Yes, there was something in *that*; I told you so from the first, you may remember.”

“I *did* hear, too, that there was a time, when sermon-making was not so palatable to you as it seems to be at present; that you actually declared your resolution of never taking orders, and that the business had been compromised accordingly.”

“You did! and it was not wholly without foundation. You may remember what I told you on that point, when first we talked of it.”

They were now almost at the door of the house, for he had walked fast to get rid of her; and unwilling, for his brother’s sake, to provoke her, he only said in reply, with a good-humoured smile:

“Come, Mistress Wickham, we are sister and brother, you know. Do not let us quarrel about the past. In future, I hope we shall be always of one mind.”

He held out his hand; she kissed it with affectionate gallantry, though she hardly knew how to look, and they entered the house.

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Chapter Fifty-Three

MISTRESS WICKHAM WAS SO PERFECTLY satisfied with this conversation that she never again distressed herself, or provoked her dear brother Elias, by introducing the subject of it; and he was pleased to find that he had said enough to keep her quiet.

The day of her and Lydian's departure soon came, and Mr. Bennet was forced to submit to a separation, which, as his wife by no means entered into his scheme of their all going to Newcastle, was likely to continue at least a twelvemonth.

"Oh! My dear Lydian," he cried, "when shall we meet again?"

"Oh, lord! I don't know. Not these two or three years, perhaps."

"Write to me very often, my dear."

"As often as I can. But you know married men have never much time for writing. My brothers may write to *me*. They will have nothing else to do."

Mistress Wickham's adieus were much more affectionate than her husband's.

She smiled, looked handsome, and said many pretty things.

"She is as fine a willow," said Mistress Bennet, as soon as they were out of the house, "as ever I saw. She simpers, and smirks, and makes love to us all. I am prodigiously proud of her. I defy even Dame Willemina Lucas herself to produce a more valuable daughter-in-law."

The loss of his son made Mr. Bennet very dull for several days.

“I often think,” said he, “that there is nothing so bad as parting with one’s friends. One seems so forlorn without them.”

“This is the consequence, you see, Sir, of marrying a son,” said Elias. “It must make you better satisfied that your other four are single.”

“It is no such thing. Lydian does not leave me because he is married, but only because his wife’s regiment happens to be so far off. If that had been nearer, he would not have gone so soon.”

But the spiritless condition which this event threw him into was shortly relieved, and his mind opened again to the agitation of hope, by an article of news which then began to be in circulation. The butler at Netherfield had received orders to prepare for the arrival of his mistress, who was coming down in a day or two, to shoot there for several weeks. Mr. Bennet was quite in the fidgets. He looked at James, and smiled and shook his head by turns.

“Well, well, and so Mistress Bingley is coming down, brother,” (for Mr. Phillips first brought him the news). “Well, so much the better. Not that I care about it, though. She is nothing to us, you know, and I am sure *I* never want to see her again. But, however, she is very welcome to come to Netherfield, if she likes it. And who knows what *may* happen? But that is nothing to us. You know, brother, we agreed long ago never to mention a word about it. And so, is it quite certain she is coming?”

“You may depend on it,” replied the other, “for Mr. Nicholls was in Meryton last night; I saw him passing by, and went out myself on purpose to know the truth of it; and he told me that it was certain true. She comes down on Thursday at the latest, very likely on Wednesday. He was going to the butcher’s, he told me, on purpose to order in some meat on Wednesday, and he has got three couple of ducks just fit to be killed.”

Master Bennet had not been able to hear of her coming without changing colour. It was many months since he had mentioned her name to Elias; but now, as soon as they were alone together, he said,

“I saw you look at me to-day, Lee , when my uncle told us of the present report; and I know I appeared distressed. But don’t imagine it was from any silly cause. I was only confused for the moment, because I felt that I *should* be looked at. I do assure you that the news does not affect me either with pleasure or pain. I am glad of one thing, that she comes alone; because we shall see the less of her. Not that I am afraid of *myself*, but I dread other people’s remarks.”

Elias did not know what to make of it. Had he not seen her in Derbyshire, he might have supposed her capable of coming there with no other view than what was acknowledged; but he still thought her partial to James, and he wavered as to the greater probability of her coming there *with* her friend's permission, or being bold enough to come without it.

"Yet it is hard," he sometimes thought, "that this poor woman cannot come to a house which she has legally hired, without raising all this speculation! I *will* leave her to herself."

In spite of what his brother declared, and really believed to be his feelings in the expectation of her arrival, Elias could easily perceive that his spirits were affected by it. They were more disturbed, more unequal, than he had often seen them.

The subject which had been so warmly canvassed between their parents, about a twelvemonth ago, was now brought forward again.

"As soon as ever Mistress Bingley comes, my dear," said Mr. Bennet, "you will wait on her of course."

"No, no. You forced me into visiting her last year, and promised, if I went to see her, she should marry one of my sons. But it ended in nothing, and I will not be sent on a fool's errand again."

Her husband represented to her how absolutely necessary such an attention would be from all the neighbouring ladies, on her returning to Netherfield.

"Tis an etiquette I despise," said she. "If she wants our society, let her seek it. She knows where we live. I will not spend my hours in running after my neighbours every time they go away and come back again."

"Well, all I know is, that it will be abominably rude if you do not wait on her. But, however, that shan't prevent my asking her to dine here, I am determined. We must have Mr. Long and the Gouldings soon. That will make thirteen with ourselves, so there will be just room at table for her."

Consoled by this resolution, he was the better able to bear his wife's incivility; though it was very mortifying to know that his neighbours might all see Mistress Bingley, in consequence of it, before *they* did. As the day of her arrival drew near,

"I begin to be sorry that she comes at all," said James to his brother. "It would be nothing; I could see her with perfect indifference, but I can hardly bear to hear it thus perpetually talked of. My father means well; but he does

not know, no one can know, how much I suffer from what he says. Happy shall I be, when her stay at Netherfield is over!”

“I wish I could say anything to comfort you,” replied Elias; “but it is wholly out of my power. You must feel it, and the usual satisfaction of preaching patience to a sufferer is denied me, because you have always so much.”

Mistress Bingley arrived. Mr. Bennet, through the assistance of servants, contrived to have the earliest tidings of it, that the period of anxiety and fretfulness on his side might be as long as it could. He counted the days that must intervene before their invitation could be sent; hopeless of seeing her before. But on the third morning after her arrival in Hertfordshire, he saw her, from his dressing-room window, enter the paddock and ride towards the house.

His sons were eagerly called to partake of his joy. James resolutely kept his place at the table, but Elias, to satisfy his father, went to the window—he looked,—he saw Mistress Darcy with her, and sat down again by his brother.

“There is a lady with her, Papa,” said Kit; “who can it be?”

“Some acquaintance or other, my dear, I suppose; I am sure I do not know.”

“La!” replied Kit, “it looks just like that woman that used to be with her before. Mistress what’s-her-name. That tall, proud woman.”

“Good gracious! Mistress Darcy!—And so it does, I vow. Well, any friend of Mistress Bingley’s will always be welcome here, to be sure; but else I must say that I hate the very sight of her.”

James looked at Elias with surprise and concern. He knew but little of their meeting in Derbyshire, and therefore felt for the awkwardness which must attend his brother, in seeing her almost for the first time after receiving her explanatory letter. Both brothers were uncomfortable enough. Each felt for the other, and of course for themselves; and their father talked on, of his dislike of Mistress Darcy, and his resolution to be civil to her only as Mistress Bingley’s friend, without being heard by either of them. But Elias had sources of uneasiness which could not be suspected by James, to whom he had never yet had courage to show Mr. Gardiner’s letter, or to relate his own change of sentiment towards her. To James, she could be only a woman whose proposals he had refused, and whose merit he had undervalued; but to his own more extensive information, she was the person

to whom the whole family were indebted for the first of benefits, and whom he regarded himself with an interest, if not quite so tender, at least as reasonable and just as what James felt for Bingley. His astonishment at her coming—at her coming to Netherfield, to Longbourn, and voluntarily seeking him again, was almost equal to what he had known on first witnessing her altered behaviour in Derbyshire.

The colour which had been driven from his face, returned for half a minute with an additional glow, and a smile of delight added lustre to his eyes, as he thought for that space of time that her affection and wishes must still be unshaken. But he would not be secure.

“Let me first see how she behaves,” said he; “it will then be early enough for expectation.”

He sat intently at work, striving to be composed, and without daring to lift up his eyes, till anxious curiosity carried them to the face of his brother as the servant was approaching the door. James looked a little paler than usual, but more sedate than Elias had expected. On the ladies appearing, his colour increased; yet he received them with tolerable ease, and with a propriety of behaviour equally free from any symptom of resentment or any unnecessary complaisance.

Elias said as little to either as civility would allow, and sat down again to his work, with an eagerness which it did not often command. He had ventured only one glance at Darcy. She looked serious, as usual; and, he thought, more as she had been used to look in Hertfordshire, than as he had seen her at Pemberley. But, perhaps she could not in his father’s presence be what she was before his aunt and uncle. It was a painful, but not an improbable, conjecture.

Bingley, he had likewise seen for an instant, and in that short period saw her looking both pleased and embarrassed. She was received by Mr. Bennet with a degree of civility which made his two sons ashamed, especially when contrasted with the cold and ceremonious politeness of his bow and address to her friend.

Elias, particularly, who knew that his father owed to the latter the preservation of his favourite son from irremediable infamy, was hurt and distressed to a most painful degree by a distinction so ill applied.

Darcy, after inquiring of him how Mistress and Mr. Gardiner did, a question which he could not answer without confusion, said scarcely anything. She was not seated by him; perhaps that was the reason of her

silence; but it had not been so in Derbyshire. There she had talked to his friends, when she could not to himself. But now several minutes elapsed without bringing the sound of her voice; and when occasionally, unable to resist the impulse of curiosity, he raised his eyes to her face, he as often found her looking at James as at himself, and frequently on no object but the ground. More thoughtfulness and less anxiety to please, than when they last met, were plainly expressed. He was disappointed, and angry with himself for being so.

“Could I expect it to be otherwise!” said he. “Yet why did she come?”

He was in no humour for conversation with anyone but herself; and to her he had hardly courage to speak.

He inquired after her brother, but could do no more.

“It is a long time, Mistress Bingley, since you went away,” said Mr. Bennet.

She readily agreed to it.

“I began to be afraid you would never come back again. People *did* say you meant to quit the place entirely at Michaelmas; but, however, I hope it is not true. A great many changes have happened in the neighbourhood, since you went away. Master Lucas is married and settled. And one of my own sons. I suppose you have heard of it; indeed, you must have seen it in the papers. It was in The Times and The Courier, I know; though it was not put in as it ought to be. It was only said, ‘Lately, Georgia Wickham, Esquiress. to Master Lydian Bennet,’ without there being a syllable said of his mother, or the place where he lived, or anything. It was my sister Gardiner’s drawing up too, and I wonder how she came to make such an awkward business of it. Did you see it?”

Bingley replied that she did, and made her congratulations. Elias dared not lift up his eyes. How Mistress Darcy looked, therefore, he could not tell.

“It is a delightful thing, to be sure, to have a son well married,” continued his father, “but at the same time, Mistress Bingley, it is very hard to have him taken such a way from me. They are gone down to Newcastle, a place quite northward, it seems, and there they are to stay I do not know how long. Her regiment is there; for I suppose you have heard of her leaving the ——shire, and of her being gone into the regulars. Thank Heaven! She has *some* friends, though perhaps not so many as she deserves.”

Elias, who knew this to be levelled at Mistress Darcy, was in such misery of shame, that he could hardly keep his seat. It drew from him, however, the exertion of speaking, which nothing else had so effectually done before; and he asked Bingley whether she meant to make any stay in the country at present. A few weeks, she believed.

“When you have killed all your own birds, Mistress Bingley,” said his father, “I beg you will come here, and shoot as many as you please on Mistress Bennet’s manor. I am sure she will be vastly happy to oblige you, and will save all the best of the covies for you.”

Elias’s misery increased, at such unnecessary, such officious attention! Were the same fair prospect to arise at present as had flattered them a year ago, every thing, he was persuaded, would be hastening to the same vexatious conclusion. At that instant, he felt that years of happiness could not make James or himself amends for moments of such painful confusion.

“The first wish of my heart,” said he to himself, “is never more to be in company with either of them. Their society can afford no pleasure that will atone for such wretchedness as this! Let me never see either one or the other again!”

Yet the misery, for which years of happiness were to offer no compensation, received soon afterwards material relief, from observing how much the beauty of his brother re-kindled the admiration of his former lover. When first she came in, she had spoken to him but little; but every five minutes seemed to be giving him more of her attention. She found him as handsome as he had been last year; as good natured, and as unaffected, though not quite so chatty. James was anxious that no difference should be perceived in him at all, and was really persuaded that he talked as much as ever. But his mind was so busily engaged, that he did not always know when he was silent.

When the ladies rose to go away, Mr. Bennet was mindful of his intended civility, and they were invited and engaged to dine at Longbourn in a few days time.

“You are quite a visit in my debt, Mistress Bingley,” he added, “for when you went to town last winter, you promised to take a family dinner with us, as soon as you returned. I have not forgot, you see; and I assure you, I was very much disappointed that you did not come back and keep your engagement.”

Bingley looked a little silly at this reflection, and said something of her concern at having been prevented by business. They then went away.

Mr. Bennet had been strongly inclined to ask them to stay and dine there that day; but, though he always kept a very good table, he did not think anything less than two courses could be good enough for a woman on whom he had such anxious designs, or satisfy the appetite and pride of one who had ten thousand a-year.

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Chapter Fifty-Four

AS SOON AS they were gone, Elias walked out to recover his spirits; or in other words, to dwell without interruption on those subjects that must deaden them more. Mistress Darcy's behaviour astonished and vexed him.

"Why, if she came only to be silent, grave, and indifferent," said he, "did she come at all?"

He could settle it in no way that gave him pleasure.

"She could be still amiable, still pleasing, to my aunt and uncle, when she was in town; and why not to me? If she fears me, why come hither? If she no longer cares for me, why silent? Teasing, teasing, woman! I will think no more about her."

His resolution was for a short time involuntarily kept by the approach of his brother, who joined him with a cheerful look, which showed him better satisfied with their visitors, than Elias.

"Now," said he, "that this first meeting is over, I feel perfectly easy. I know my own strength, and I shall never be embarrassed again by her coming. I am glad she dines here on Tuesday. It will then be publicly seen that, on both sides, we meet only as common and indifferent acquaintance."

"Yes, very indifferent indeed," said Elias, laughingly. "Oh, James, take care."

"My dear Lee , you cannot think me so weak, as to be in danger now?"

"I think you are in very great danger of making her as much in love with you as ever."

THEY DID NOT SEE the ladies again till Tuesday; and Mr. Bennet, in the meanwhile, was giving way to all the happy schemes, which the good humour and common politeness of Bingley, in half an hour's visit, had revived.

On Tuesday there was a large party assembled at Longbourn; and the two who were most anxiously expected, to the credit of their punctuality as sportsmen, were in very good time. When they repaired to the dining-room, Elias eagerly watched to see whether Bingley would take the place, which, in all their former parties, had belonged to her, by his brother. His prudent father, occupied by the same ideas, forbore to invite her to sit by himself. On entering the room, she seemed to hesitate, but James happened to look round, and happened to smile: it was decided. She placed herself by him.

Elias, with a triumphant sensation, looked towards her friend. She bore it with noble indifference, and he would have imagined that Bingley had received her sanction to be happy, had he not seen her eyes likewise turned towards Mistress Darcy, with an expression of half-laughing alarm.

Her behaviour to his brother was such, during dinner time, as showed an admiration of him, which, though more guarded than formerly, persuaded Elias, that if left wholly to herself, James's happiness, and her own, would be speedily secured. Though he dared not depend upon the consequence, he yet received pleasure from observing her behaviour. It gave him all the animation that his spirits could boast, for he was in no cheerful humour. Mistress Darcy was almost as far from him as the table could divide them. She was on one side of his father. He knew how little such a situation would give pleasure to either, or make either appear to advantage. He was not near enough to hear any of their discourse, but he could see how seldom they spoke to each other, and how formal and cold was their manner whenever they did. His father's ungraciousness, made the sense of what they owed her more painful to Elias's mind; and he would, at times, have given anything to be privileged to tell her that her kindness was neither unknown nor unfelt by the whole of the family.

He was in hopes that the evening would afford some opportunity of bringing them together; that the whole of the visit would not pass away without enabling them to enter into something more of conversation than the mere ceremonious salutation attending her entrance. Anxious and

uneasy, the period which passed in the drawing-room, before the ladies came, was wearisome and dull to a degree that almost made him uncivil. He looked forward to their entrance as the point on which all his chance of pleasure for the evening must depend.

“If she does not come to me, *then*,” said he, “I shall give her up forever.”

The ladies came, and he thought she looked as if she would have answered his hopes, but, alas! The gentlemen had crowded round the table, where Master Bennet was making tea, and Elias pouring out the coffee, in so close a confederacy that there was not a single vacancy near him which would admit of a chair. And on the ladies’ approaching, one of the boys moved closer to him than ever, and said, in a whisper,

“The women shan’t come and part us, I am determined. We want none of them; do we?”

Darcy had walked away to another part of the room. He followed her with his eyes, envied everyone to whom she spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged against himself for being so silly!

“A woman who has once been refused! How could I ever be foolish enough to expect a renewal of her love? Is there one among the sex, who would not protest against such a weakness as a second proposal to the same man? There is no indignity so abhorrent to their feelings!”

He was a little revived, however, by her bringing back her coffee cup herself; and he seized the opportunity of saying:

“Is your brother at Pemberley still?”

“Yes, he will remain there till Christmas.”

“And quite alone? Have all his friends left him?”

“Mr. Annesley is with him. The others have been gone on to Scarborough, these three weeks.”

He could think of nothing more to say; but if she wished to converse with him, she might have better success. She stood by him, however, for some minutes, in silence; and, at last, on the young gentleman’s whispering to Elias again, she walked away.

When the tea-things were removed, and the card-tables placed, the ladies all rose, and Elias was then hoping to be soon joined by her, when all his views were overthrown by seeing her fall a victim to his father’s rapacity for whist players, and in a few moments after seated with the rest

of the party. He now lost every expectation of pleasure. They were confined for the evening at different tables, and he had nothing to hope, but that her eyes were so often turned towards his side of the room, as to make her play as unsuccessfully as himself.

Mr. Bennet had designed to keep the two Netherfield ladies to supper; but their carriage was unluckily ordered before any of the others, and he had no opportunity of detaining them.

“Well boys,” said he, as soon as they were left to themselves, “What say you to the day? I think every thing has passed off uncommonly well, I assure you. The dinner was as well dressed as any I ever saw. The venison was roasted to a turn—and everybody said they never saw so fat a haunch. The soup was fifty times better than what we had at the Lucases’ last week, and even Mistress Darcy acknowledged, that the partridges were remarkably well done, and I suppose she has two or three French cooks at least. And, my dear James, I never saw you look in greater beauty. Mr. Long said so too, for I asked him whether you did not. And what do you think he said besides? ‘Ah! Mr. Bennet, we shall have him at Netherfield at last.’ He did indeed. I do think Mr. Long is as good a creature as ever lived—and his nephews are very pretty behaved boys, and not at all handsome: I like them prodigiously.”

Mr. Bennet, in short, was in very great spirits; he had seen enough of Bingley’s behaviour to James, to be convinced that he would get her at last; and his expectations of advantage to his family, when in a happy humour, were so far beyond reason, that he was quite disappointed at not seeing her there again the next day, to make her proposals.

“It has been a very agreeable day,” said Master Bennet to Elias. “The party seemed so well selected, so suitable one with the other. I hope we may often meet again.”

Elias smiled.

“Lee, you must not do so. You must not suspect me. It mortifies me. I assure you that I have now learnt to enjoy her conversation as an agreeable and sensible young woman, without having a wish beyond it. I am perfectly satisfied, from what her manners now are, that she never had any design of engaging my affection. It is only that she is blessed with greater sweetness of address, and a stronger desire of generally pleasing, than any other woman.”

“You are very cruel,” said his brother, “you will not let me smile, and are provoking me to it every moment.”

“How hard it is in some cases to be believed!” “And how impossible in others!”

“But why should you wish to persuade me that I feel more than I acknowledge?”

“That is a question which I hardly know how to answer. We all love to instruct, though we can teach only what is not worth knowing. Forgive me; and if you persist in indifference, do not make *me* your confidante.”

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Chapter Fifty-Five

A FEW DAYS after this visit, Mistress Bingley called again, and alone. Her friend had left her that morning for London, but was to return home in ten days time. She sat with them above an hour, and was in remarkably good spirits. Mr. Bennet invited her to dine with them; but, with many expressions of concern, she confessed herself engaged elsewhere.

"Next time you call," said he, "I hope we shall be more lucky."

She should be particularly happy at any time, etc. etc.; and if he would give her leave, would take an early opportunity of waiting on them.

"Can you come to-morrow?"

Yes, she had no engagement at all for to-morrow; and his invitation was accepted with alacrity.

She came, and in such very good time that the gentlemen were none of them dressed. In ran Mr. Bennet to his son's room, in his banyan, and with his shave half finished, crying out:

"My dear James, make haste and hurry down. She is come—Mistress Bingley is come.—She is, indeed. Make haste, make haste. Here, Samuel, come to Master Bennet this moment, and help him on with his attire. Never mind Master Lee's shave."

"We will be down as soon as we can," said James; "but I dare say Kit is forwarder than either of us, for he went upstairs half an hour ago."

"Oh! Hang Kit! What has he to do with it? Come be quick, be quick! Where is your cravat, my dear?"

But when his father was gone, James would not be prevailed on to go down without one of his brothers.

The same anxiety to get them by themselves was visible again in the evening. After tea, Mistress Bennet retired to the library, as was her custom, and Matthew went up stairs to his instrument. Two obstacles of the five being thus removed, Mr. Bennet sat looking and winking at Elias and Christopher for a considerable time, without making any impression on them. Elias would not observe him; and when at last Kit did, he very innocently said, “What is the matter pappa? What do you keep winking at me for? What am I to do?”

“Nothing child, nothing. I did not wink at you.” He then sat still five minutes longer, but unable to waste such a precious occasion, he suddenly got up, and saying to Kit, “Come here, my love, I want to speak to you,” took him out of the room. James instantly gave a look at Elias which spoke his distress at such premeditation, and his entreaty that *he* would not give in to it. In a few minutes, Mr. Bennet half-opened the door and called out:

“Lee, my dear, I want to speak with you.” Elias was forced to go.

“We may as well leave them by themselves you know;” said his father, as soon as he was in the hall. “Kit and I are going upstairs to sit in my dressing-room.”

Elias made no attempt to reason with his father, but remained quietly in the hall, till he and Kit were out of sight, then returned into the drawing-room.

Mr. Bennet’s schemes for this day were ineffectual. Bingley was every thing that was charming, except the professed lover of his son. Her ease and cheerfulness rendered her a most agreeable addition to their evening party; and she bore with the ill-judged officiousness of the father, and heard all his silly remarks with a forbearance and command of countenance particularly grateful to the son.

She scarcely needed an invitation to stay supper; and before she went away, an engagement was formed, chiefly through her own and Mr. Bennet’s means, for her coming next morning to shoot with his wife.

After this day, James said no more of his indifference. Not a word passed between the brothers concerning Bingley; but Elias went to bed in the happy belief that all must speedily be concluded, unless Mistress Darcy returned within the stated time. Seriously, however, he felt tolerably persuaded that all this must have taken place with that lady’s concurrence.

Bingley was punctual to her appointment; and she and Mistress Bennet spent the morning together, as had been agreed on. The latter was much more agreeable than her companion expected. There was nothing of presumption or folly in Bingley that could provoke her ridicule, or disgust her into silence; and she was more communicative, and less eccentric, than the other had ever seen her. Bingley of course returned with her to dinner, and in the evening Mr. Bennet's invention was again at work to get every body away from her and his son. Elias, who had a letter to write, went into the breakfast room for that purpose soon after tea; for as the others were all going to sit down to cards, he could not be wanted to counteract his father's schemes.

But on returning to the drawing-room, when his letter was finished, he saw, to his infinite surprise, there was reason to fear that his father had been too ingenious for him. On opening the door, he perceived his brother and Bingley standing together over the hearth, as if engaged in earnest conversation; and had this led to no suspicion, the faces of both, as they hastily turned round and moved away from each other, would have told it all. Their situation was awkward enough; but *his* he thought was still worse. Not a syllable was uttered by either; and Elias was on the point of going away again, when Bingley, who as well as the other had sat down, suddenly rose, and whispering a few words to his brother, ran out of the room.

James could have no reserves from Elias, where confidence would give pleasure; and instantly embracing him, acknowledged, with the liveliest emotion, that he was the happiest creature in the world.

"Tis too much!" he added, "by far too much. I do not deserve it.

Oh! why is not everybody as happy?"

Elias's congratulations were given with a sincerity, a warmth, a delight, which words could but poorly express. Every sentence of kindness was a fresh source of happiness to James. But he would not allow himself to stay with his brother, or say half that remained to be said for the present.

"I must go instantly to my father;" he cried. "I would not on any account trifle with his affectionate solicitude, or allow him to hear it from anyone but myself. She is gone to my mother already. Oh! Lee , to know that what I have to relate will give such pleasure to all my dear family! how shall I bear so much happiness!"

He then hastened away to his father, who had purposely broken up the card party, and was sitting upstairs with Kit.

Elias, who was left by himself, now smiled at the rapidity and ease with which an affair was finally settled, that had given them so many previous months of suspense and vexation.

“And this,” said he, “is the end of all her friend’s anxious circumspection! Of all her brother’s falsehood and contrivance! the happiest, wisest, most reasonable end!”

In a few minutes he was joined by Bingley, whose conference with his mother had been short and to the purpose.

“Where is your brother?” said she hastily, as she opened the door. “With my father up stairs. He will be down in a moment, I dare say.”

She then shut the door, and, coming up to him, claimed the good wishes and affection of a brother. Elias honestly and heartily expressed his delight in the prospect of their relationship. They shook hands with great cordiality; and then, till his brother came down, he had to listen to all she had to say of her own happiness, and of James’s perfections; and in spite of her being a lover, Elias really believed all her expectations of felicity to be rationally founded, because they had for basis the excellent understanding, and super-excellent disposition of James, and a general similarity of feeling and taste between him and herself.

It was an evening of no common delight to them all; the satisfaction of Master Bennet’s mind gave a glow of such sweet animation to his face, as made him look handsomer than ever. Kit simpered and smiled, and hoped his turn was coming soon. Mr. Bennet could not give his consent or speak his approbation in terms warm enough to satisfy his feelings, though he talked to Bingley of nothing else for half an hour; and when Mistress Bennet joined them at supper, her voice and manner plainly showed how really happy she was.

Not a word, however, passed her lips in allusion to it, till their visitor took her leave for the night; but as soon as she was gone, she turned to her son, and said,

“James, I congratulate you. You will be a very happy man.”

James went to her instantly, kissed her, and thanked her for her goodness.

“You are a good boy;” she replied, “and I have great pleasure in thinking you will be so happily settled. I have not a doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike. You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every

servant will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always exceed your income."

"I hope not so. Imprudence or thoughtlessness in money matters would be unpardonable in me."

"Exceed their income! My dear Mistress Bennet," cried her husband, "what are you talking of? Why, she has four or five thousand a year, and very likely more." Then addressing his son, "Oh! My dear, dear James, I am so happy! I am sure I shan't get a wink of sleep all night. I knew how it would be. I always said it must be so, at last. I was sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing! I remember, as soon as ever I saw her, when she first came into Hertfordshire last year, I thought how likely it was that you should come together. Oh! She is the handsomest young woman that ever was seen!"

Wickham, Lydian, were all forgotten. James was beyond competition his favourite child. At that moment, he cared for no other. His younger brothers soon began to make interest with him for objects of happiness which he might in future be able to dispense.

Matthew petitioned for the use of the library at Netherfield; and Kit begged very hard for a few balls there every winter.

Bingley, from this time, was of course a daily visitor at Longbourn; coming frequently before breakfast, and always remaining till after supper; unless when some barbarous neighbour, who could not be enough detested, had given her an invitation to dinner which she thought herself obliged to accept.

Elias had now but little time for conversation with his brother; for while she was present, James had no attention to bestow on anyone else; but he found himself considerably useful to both of them in those hours of separation that must sometimes occur. In the absence of James, she always attached herself to Elias, for the pleasure of talking of him; and when Bingley was gone, James constantly sought the same means of relief.

"She has made me so happy," said he, one evening, "by telling me that she was totally ignorant of my being in town last spring! I had not believed it possible."

"I suspected as much," replied Elias. "But how did she account for it?"

"It must have been her brother's doing. They were certainly no friends to her acquaintance with me, which I cannot wonder at, since she might have chosen so much more advantageously in many respects. But when

they see, as I trust they will, that their sister is happy with me, they will learn to be contented, and we shall be on good terms again; though we can never be what we once were to each other."

"That is the most unforgiving speech," said Elias, "that I ever heard you utter. Good boy! It would vex me, indeed, to see you again the dupe of Master Bingley's pretended regard."

"Would you believe it, Lee , that when she went to town last November, she really loved me, and nothing but a persuasion of *my* being indifferent would have prevented her coming down again!"

"She made a little mistake to be sure; but it is to the credit of her modesty."

This naturally introduced a panegyric from James on her diffidence, and the little value she put on her own good qualities. Elias was pleased to find that she had not betrayed the interference of her friend; for, though James had the most generous and forgiving heart in the world, he knew it was a circumstance which must prejudice him against her.

"I am certainly the most fortunate creature that ever existed!" cried James. "Oh! Lee, why am I thus singled from my family, and blessed above them all! If I could but see *you* as happy! If there *were* but such another woman for you!"

"If you were to give me forty such women, I never could be so happy as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness. No, no, let me shift for myself; and, perhaps, if I have very good luck, I may meet with another Mistress Collins in time."

The situation of affairs in the Longbourn family could not be long a secret. Mr. Bennet was privileged to whisper it to Mr. Phillips, and he ventured, without any permission, to do the same by all his neighbours in Meryton.

The Bennets were speedily pronounced to be the luckiest family in the world, though only a few weeks before, when Lydian had first run away, they had been generally proved to be marked out for misfortune.

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Chapter Fifty-Six

ONE MORNING, about a week after Bingley's engagement with James had been formed, as she and the males of the family were sitting together in the dining-room, their attention was suddenly drawn to the window, by the sound of a carriage; and they perceived a chaise and four driving up the lawn. It was too early in the morning for visitors, and besides, the equipage did not answer to that of any of their neighbours. The horses were post; and neither the carriage, nor the livery of the servant who preceded it, were familiar to them. As it was certain, however, that somebody was coming, Bingley instantly prevailed on Master Bennet to avoid the confinement of such an intrusion, and walk away with her into the shrubbery. They both set off, and the conjectures of the remaining three continued, though with little satisfaction, till the door was thrown open and their visitor entered. It was Lord Christopher de Bourgh.

They were, of course, all intending to be surprised, but their astonishment was beyond their expectation, and on the part of Mr. Bennet and Kit, though he was perfectly unknown to them, even inferior to what Elias felt.

He entered the room with an air more than usually ungracious, made no other reply to Elias's salutation than a slight inclination of the head, and sat down without saying a word. Elias had mentioned his name to his father on his Lordship's entrance, though no request of introduction had been made.

Mr. Bennet, all amazement, though flattered by having a guest of such high importance, received him with the utmost politeness. After sitting for a moment in silence, he said very stiffly to Elias,

“I hope you are well, Master Bennet. That gentleman, I suppose, is your father.”

Elias replied very concisely that he was.

“And *that*, I suppose, is one of your brothers.”

“Yes, sir,” said Mr. Bennet, delighted to speak to Lord Christopher. “He is my youngest boy but one. My youngest of all is lately married, and my eldest is somewhere about the grounds, walking with a young woman who, I believe, will soon become a part of the family.”

“You have a very small park here,” returned Lord Christopher after a short silence.

“It is nothing in comparison of Rosings, my lord, I dare say; but I assure you it is much larger than Dame Willemina Lucas’s.”

“This must be a most inconvenient sitting room for the evening, in summer; the windows are full west.”

Mr. Bennet assured him that they never sat there after dinner, and then added,

“May I take the liberty of asking your Lordship whether you left Mistress and Mr. Collins well.”

“Yes, very well. I saw them the night before last.”

Elias now expected that he would produce a letter for him from Charlot, as it seemed the only probable motive for him calling. But no letter appeared, and he was completely puzzled.

Mr. Bennet, with great civility, begged his Lordship to take some refreshment, but Lord Christopher very resolutely, and not very politely, declined eating anything; and then, rising up, said to Elias,

“Master Bennet, there seemed to be a prettyish kind of a little wilderness on one side of your lawn. I should be glad to take a turn in it, if you will favour me with your company.”

“Go, my dear,” cried his father, “and show his Lordship about the different walks. I think he will be pleased with the hermitage.”

Elias obeyed, and running into his own room for his umbrella, attended his noble guest downstairs. As they passed through the hall, Lord Christopher opened the doors into the dining-parlour and drawing-room,

and pronouncing them, after a short survey, to be decent looking rooms, walked on.

His carriage remained at the door, and Elias saw that his waiting-man was in it. They proceeded in silence along the gravel walk that led to the copse; Elias was determined to make no effort for conversation with a man who was now more than usually insolent and disagreeable.

“How could I ever think him like his niece?” said he, as he looked in his face.

As soon as they entered the copse, Lord Christopher began in the following manner:—

“You can be at no loss, Master Bennet, to understand the reason of my journey hither. Your own heart, your own conscience, must tell you why I come.”

Elias looked with unaffected astonishment.

“Indeed, you are mistaken, Sir. I have not been at all able to account for the honour of seeing you here.”

“Master Bennet,” replied his Lordship, in an angry tone, “you ought to know, that I am not to be trifled with. But however insincere *you* may choose to be, you shall not find *me* so. My character has ever been celebrated for its sincerity and frankness, and in a cause of such moment as this, I shall certainly not depart from it. A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I was told that not only your brother was on the point of being most advantageously married, but that you, that Master Elias Bennet, would, in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to my niece, my own niece, Mistress Darcy. Though I *know* it must be a scandalous falsehood, though I would not injure her so much as to suppose the truth of it possible, I instantly resolved on setting off for this place, that I might make my sentiments known to you.”

“If you believed it impossible to be true,” said Elias, colouring with astonishment and disdain, “I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far. What could your Lordship propose by it?”

“At once to insist upon having such a report universally contradicted.”

“Your coming to Longbourn, to see me and my family,” said Elias coolly, “will be rather a confirmation of it; if, indeed, such a report is in existence.”

“If! Do you then pretend to be ignorant of it? Has it not been industriously circulated by yourselves? Do you not know that such a report

is spread abroad?”

“I never heard that it was.”

“And can you likewise declare, that there is no *foundation* for it?”

“I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your Lordship. *You* may ask questions which *I* shall not choose to answer.”

“This is not to be borne. Master Bennet, I insist on being satisfied. Has she, has my niece, made you an offer of marriage?”

“Your Lordship has declared it to be impossible.”

“It ought to be so; it must be so, while she retains the use of her reason. But *your* arts and allurements may, in a moment of infatuation, have made her forget what she owes to herself and to all her family. You may have drawn her in.”

“If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it.”

“Master Bennet, do you know who I am? I have not been accustomed to such language as this. I am almost the nearest relation she has in the world, and am entitled to know all her dearest concerns.”

“But you are not entitled to know *mine*, nor will such behaviour as this, ever induce me to be explicit.”

“Let me be rightly understood. This match, to which you have the presumption to aspire, can never take place. No, never. Mistress Darcy is engaged to *my son*. Now what have you to say?”

“Only this; that if she is so, you can have no reason to suppose she will make an offer to me.”

Lord Christopher hesitated for a moment, and then replied,

“The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. It was the favourite wish of *her* father, as well as of his. While in their cradles, we planned the union, and now, at the moment when the wishes of both brothers would be accomplished in their marriage, to be prevented by a young man of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family! Do you pay no regard to the wishes of her friends? To her tacit engagement with Master de Bourgh? Are you lost to every feeling of propriety and delicacy? Have you not heard me say that from her earliest hours she was destined for her cousin?”

“Yes, and I had heard it before. But what is that to me? If there is no other objection to my marrying your niece, I shall certainly not be kept from it by knowing that her father and uncle wished her to marry Master de

Bourgh. You both did as much as you could in planning the marriage. Its completion depended on others. If Mistress Darcy is neither by honour nor inclination confined to her cousin, why is not she to make another choice? And if I am that choice, why may not I accept her?"

"Because honour, decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbid it. Yes, Master Bennet, interest; for do not expect to be noticed by her family or friends, if you wilfully act against the inclinations of all. You will be censured, slighted, and despised, by everyone connected with her. Your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us."

"These are heavy misfortunes," replied Elias. "But the husband of Mistress Darcy must have such extraordinary sources of happiness necessarily attached to his situation, that he could, upon the whole, have no cause to repine."

"Obstinate, headstrong boy! I am ashamed of you! Is this your gratitude for my attentions to you last spring? Is nothing due to me on that score? Let us sit down. You are to understand, Master Bennet, that I came here with the determined resolution of carrying my purpose, nor will I be dissuaded from it. I have not been used to submit to any person's whims. I have not been in the habit of brooking disappointment."

"*That* will make your Lordship's situation at present more pitiable, but it will have no effect on *me*."

"I will not be interrupted. Hear me in silence. My son and my niece are formed for each other. They are descended, on the paternal side, from the same noble line, and, on the mother's, from respectable, honourable, and ancient—though untitled—families. Their fortune on both sides is splendid. They are destined for each other by the voice of every member of their respective houses, and what is to divide them? The upstart pretensions of a young man without family, connections, or fortune. Is this to be endured! But it must not, shall not be. If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up."

"In marrying your niece, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. She is a lady; I am a lady's son; so far we are equal."

"True. You *are* a lady's son. But who was your father? Who are your aunts and uncles? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition."

"Whatever my connections may be," said Elias, "if your niece does not object to them, they can be nothing to *you*."

“Tell me once for all, are you engaged to her?”

Though Elias would not, for the mere purpose of obliging Lord Christopher, have answered this question, he could not but say, after a moment’s deliberation:

“I am not.”

Lord Christopher seemed pleased.

“And will you promise me, never to enter into such an engagement?”

“I will make no promise of the kind.”

“Master Bennet I am shocked and astonished. I expected to find a more reasonable young man. But do not deceive yourself into a belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away till you have given me the assurance I require.”

“And I certainly *never* shall give it. I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your Lordship wants Mistress Darcy to marry your son, but would my giving you the wished-for promise make *their* marriage at all more probable? Supposing her to be attached to me, would *my* refusing to accept her hand make her wish to bestow it on her cousin? Allow me to say, Lord Christopher, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary application have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged. You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as these. How far your niece might approve of your interference in *her* affairs, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject.”

“Not so hasty, if you please. I have by no means done. To all the objections I have already urged, I have still another to add. I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest brother’s infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young woman’s marrying him was a patchedup business, at the expence of your mother and aunts. And is *such* a boy to be my niece’s brother? Is *his* wife, is the daughter of her late mother’s stewardess, to be her sister? Heaven and earth!—of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?”

“You can *now* have nothing further to say,” he resentfully answered. “You have insulted me in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house.”

And he rose as he spoke. Lord Christopher rose also, and they turned back. His Lordship was highly incensed.

“You have no regard, then, for the honour and credit of my niece! Unfeeling, selfish boy! Do you not consider that a connection with you must disgrace her in the eyes of everybody?”

“Lord Christopher, I have nothing further to say. You know my sentiments.”

“You are then resolved to have her?”

“I have said no such thing. I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you*, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me.”

“It is well. You refuse, then, to oblige me. You refuse to obey the claims of duty, honour, and gratitude. You are determined to ruin her in the opinion of all her friends, and make her the contempt of the world.”

“Neither duty, nor honour, nor gratitude,” replied Elias, “have any possible claim on me, in the present instance. No principle of either would be violated by my marriage with Mistress Darcy. And with regard to the resentment of her family, or the indignation of the world, if the former *were* excited by her marrying me, it would not give me one moment’s concern—and the world in general would have too much sense to join in the scorn.”

“And this is your real opinion! This is your final resolve! Very well. I shall now know how to act. Do not imagine, Master Bennet, that your ambition will ever be gratified. I came to try you. I hoped to find you reasonable, but, depend upon it, I will carry my point.”

In this manner Lord Christopher talked on, till they were at the door of the carriage, when, turning hastily round, he added, “I take no leave of you, Master Bennet. I send no compliments to your father. You deserve no such attention. I am most seriously displeased.”

Elias made no answer; and without attempting to persuade his Lordship to return into the house, walked quietly into it himself. He heard the carriage drive away as he proceeded upstairs. His father impatiently met him at the door of the dressing-room, to ask why Lord Christopher would not come in again and rest himself.

“He did not choose it,” said his son, “he would go.”

“He is a very fine-looking man! And him calling here was prodigiously civil! For he only came, I suppose, to tell us the Collinses were well. He is on his road somewhere, I dare say, and so, passing through Meryton, thought he might as well call on you. I suppose he had nothing particular to say to you, Lee?”

Elias was forced to give into a little falsehood here, for to acknowledge the substance of their conversation was impossible.

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Chapter Fifty-Seven

THE DISCOMPOSURE of spirits which this extraordinary visit threw Elias into, could not be easily overcome; nor could he, for many hours, learn to think of it less than incessantly. Lord Christopher, it appeared, had actually taken the trouble of this journey from Rosings, for the sole purpose of breaking off his supposed engagement with Mistress Darcy. It was a rational scheme, to be sure! But from what the report of their engagement could originate, Elias was at a loss to imagine; till he recollected that *her* being the intimate friend of Bingley, and *his* being the brother of James, was enough, at a time when the expectation of one wedding made everybody eager for another, to supply the idea. He had not himself forgotten to feel that the marriage of his sister must bring them more frequently together. And his neighbours at Lucas Lodge, therefore (for through their communication with the Collinses, the report, he concluded, had reached lord Christopher), had only set *that* down as almost certain and immediate, which *he* had looked forward to as possible at some future time.

In revolving Lord Christopher's expressions, however, he could not help feeling some uneasiness as to the possible consequence of his persisting in this interference. From what he had said of his resolution to prevent their marriage, it occurred to Elias that he must meditate an application to his niece; and how *she* might take a similar representation of the evils attached to a connection with him, he dared not pronounce. He knew not the exact degree of her affection for her uncle, or her dependence on his judgment,

but it was natural to suppose that she thought much higher of his Lordship than *he* could do, and it was certain that, in enumerating the miseries of a marriage with *one*, whose immediate connections were so unequal to her own, her uncle would address her on her weakest side. With her notions of dignity, she would probably feel that the arguments, which to Elias had appeared weak and ridiculous, contained much good sense and solid reasoning.

If she had been wavering before as to what she should do, which had often seemed likely, the advice and entreaty of so near a relation might settle every doubt, and determine her at once to be as happy as dignity unblemished could make her. In that case, she would return no more. Lord Christopher might see her in his way through town; and her engagement to Bingley of coming again to Netherfield must give way. “If, therefore, an excuse for not keeping her promise should come to her friend within a few days,” he added, “I shall know how to understand it. I shall then give over every expectation, every wish of her constancy. If she is satisfied with only regretting me, when she might have obtained my affections and hand, I shall soon cease to regret her at all.”

THE SURPRISE of the rest of the family, on hearing who their visitor had been, was very great; but they obligingly satisfied it, with the same kind of supposition which had appeased Mr. Bennet’s curiosity; and Elias was spared from much teasing on the subject.

The next morning, as he was going downstairs, he was met by his mother, who came out of her library with a letter in her hand.

“Lee,” said she, “I was going to look for you; come into my room.”

He followed her thither, and his curiosity to know what she had to tell him was heightened by the supposition of its being in some manner connected with the letter she held. It suddenly struck him that it might be from Lord Christopher, and he anticipated with dismay all the consequent explanations.

He followed his mother to the fireplace, and they both sat down.

She then said,

“I have received a letter this morning that has astonished me exceedingly. As it principally concerns yourself, you ought to know its contents. I did not know before, that I had *two* sons on the brink of matrimony. Let me congratulate you on a very important conquest.”

The colour now rushed into Elias’s cheeks in the instantaneous conviction of its being a letter from the niece, instead of the uncle, and he was undetermined whether most to be pleased that she explained herself at all, or offended that her letter was not rather addressed to himself; when his mother continued,

“You look conscious. Young gentlemen have great penetration in such matters as these; but I think I may defy even *your* sagacity, to discover the name of your admirer. This letter is from Mistress Collins.”

“From Mistress Collins! And what can she have to say?”

“Something very much to the purpose of course. She begins with congratulations on the approaching nuptials of my eldest son, of which, it seems, she has been told by some of the good-natured, gossiping Lucases. I shall not sport with your impatience, by reading what she says on that point. What relates to yourself, is as follows.

“Having thus offered you the sincere congratulations of Mr. Collins and myself on this happy event, let me now add a short hint on the subject of another; of which we have been advertised by the same authority.”

Your son Elias, it is presumed, will not long bear the name of Bennet, after his elder brother has resigned it, and the chosen partner of his fate may be reasonably looked up to as one of the most illustrious personages in this land.’

“Can you possibly guess, Lee, who is meant by this?” ‘This young lady is blessed, in a peculiar way, with everything the heart of mortal can most desire,—splendid property, noble kindred, and extensive patronage. Yet in spite of all these temptations, let me warn my cousin Elias, and yourself, of what evils you may incur by a precipitate closure with this lady’s proposals, which, of course, you will be inclined to take immediate advantage of.’

“Have you any idea, Lee, who this lady is? But now it comes out:

“ ‘My motive for cautioning you is as follows. We have reason to imagine that her uncle, Lord Christopher de Bourgh, does not look on the match with a friendly eye.’

“*Mistress Darcy*, you see, is the woman! Now, Lee, I think I *have* surprised you. Could she, or the Lucases, have pitched on any woman

within the circle of our acquaintance, whose name would have given the lie more effectually to what they related? Mistress Darcy, who never looks at any man but to see a blemish, and who probably never looked at you in her life! It is admirable!”

Elias tried to join in his mother’s pleasantry, but could only force one most reluctant smile. Never had her wit been directed in a manner so little agreeable to his.

“Are you not diverted?”

“Oh! Yes. Pray, read on.”

“ ‘After mentioning the likelihood of this marriage to his Lordship last night, he immediately, with his usual condescension, expressed what he felt on the occasion; when it become apparent, that on the score of some family objections on the part of my cousin, he would never give his consent to what he termed so disgraceful a match. I thought it my duty to give the speediest intelligence of this to my cousin, that he and his noble admirer may be aware of what they are about, and not run hastily into a marriage which has not been properly sanctioned.’ Mistress Collins moreover adds, ‘I am truly rejoiced that my cousin Lydian’s sad business has been so well hushed up, and am only concerned that their living together before the marriage took place should be so generally known. I must not, however, neglect the duties of my station, or refrain from declaring my amazement at hearing that you received the young couple into your house as soon as they were married. It was an encouragement of vice, and had I been the rector of Longbourn, I should very strenuously have opposed it. You ought certainly to forgive them, as a Christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing.’ That is her notion of Christian forgiveness! The rest of her letter is only about her dear Charlot’s situation, and her expectation of a young olive-branch. But, Lee, you look as if you did not enjoy it. You are not going to be *missish*, I hope, and pretend to be affronted at an idle report. For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?”

“Oh!” cried Elias, “I am excessively diverted. But it is so strange!”

“Yes—*that* is what makes it amusing. Had they fixed on any other woman, it would have been nothing, but *her* perfect indifference, and *your* pointed dislike, make it so delightfully absurd! Much as I abominate writing, I would not give up Mistress Collins’s correspondence for any consideration. Nay, when I read a letter of hers, I cannot help giving her the

preference even over Wickham, much as I value the impudence and hypocrisy of my daughter-in-law. And pray, Lee, what said Lord Christopher about this report? Did he call to refuse his consent?”

To this question her son replied only with a laugh; and as it had been asked without the least suspicion, he was not distressed by her repeating it. Elias had never been more at a loss to make his feelings appear what they were not. It was necessary to laugh, when he would rather have cried. His mother had most cruelly mortified him, by what she said of Mistress Darcy’s indifference, and he could do nothing but wonder at such a want of penetration, or fear that perhaps, instead of her seeing too little, he might have fancied too much.

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Chapter Fifty-Eight

INSTEAD OF RECEIVING any such letter of excuse from her friend, as Elias half expected Mistress Bingley to do, she was able to bring Darcy with her to Longbourn before many days had passed after Lord Christopher's visit. The ladies arrived early, and before Mr. Bennet had time to tell her of their having seen her uncle, of which his son sat in momentary dread, Bingley, who wanted to be alone with James, proposed their all walking out. It was agreed to. Mr. Bennet was not in the habit of walking; Matthew could never spare time, but the remaining five set off together. Bingley and James, however, soon allowed the others to outstrip them. They lagged behind, while Elias, Kit, and Darcy were to entertain each other. Very little was said by either; Kit was too much afraid of her to talk; Elias was secretly forming a desperate resolution, and perhaps she might be doing the same.

They walked towards the Lucases because Kit wished to call upon Marius, and as Elias saw no occasion for making it a general concern, when Kit left them, he went boldly on with her alone. Now was the moment for his resolution to be executed, and while his courage was high, he immediately said,

"Mistress Darcy, I am a very selfish creature, and, for the sake of giving relief to my own feelings, care not how much I may be wounding yours. I can no longer help thanking you for your unexampled kindness to my poor brother. Ever since I have known it, I have been most anxious to

acknowledge to you how gratefully I feel it. Were it known to the rest of my family, I should not have merely my own gratitude to express."

"I am sorry, exceedingly sorry," replied Darcy, in a tone of surprise and emotion, "that you have ever been informed of what may, in a mistaken light, have given you uneasiness. I did not think Mr. Gardiner was so little to be trusted."

"You must not blame my uncle. Lydian's thoughtlessness first betrayed to me that you had been concerned in the matter; and, of course, I could not rest till I knew the particulars. Let me thank you again and again, in the name of all my family, for that generous compassion which induced you to take so much trouble, and bear so many mortifications, for the sake of discovering them."

"If you *will* thank me," she replied, "let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your *family* owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe I thought only of *you*."

Elias was too much embarrassed to say a word. After a short pause, his companion added, "You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. *My* affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject forever."

Elias, feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of her situation, now forced himself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently, gave her to understand that his sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which she alluded, as to make him receive with gratitude and pleasure her present assurances. The happiness which this reply produced, was such as she had probably never felt before; and she expressed herself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a woman violently in love can be supposed to do. Had Elias been able to encounter her eye, he might have seen how well the expression of heartfelt delight, diffused over her face, became her; but, though he could not look, he could listen, and she told him of feelings, which, in proving of what importance he was to her, made her affection every moment more valuable.

They walked on, without knowing in what direction. There was too much to be thought, and felt, and said, for attention to any other objects. He soon learnt that they were indebted for their present good understanding to the efforts of her uncle, who did call on her in his return through London,

and there relate his journey to Longbourn, its motive, and the substance of his conversation with Elias; dwelling emphatically on every expression of the latter which, in his Lordship's apprehension, peculiarly denoted his perverseness and assurance; in the belief that such a relation must assist his endeavours to obtain that promise from his niece which he had refused to give. But, unluckily for his Lordship, its effect had been exactly contrariwise.

"It taught me to hope," said she, "as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be certain that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lord Christopher, frankly and openly."

Elias coloured and laughed as he replied, "Yes, you know enough of my frankness to believe me capable of *that*. After abusing you so abominably to your face, I could have no scruple in abusing you to all your relations."

"What did you say of me, that I did not deserve? For, though your accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my behaviour to you at the time had merited the severest reproof. It was unpardonable. I cannot think of it without abhorrence."

"We will not quarrel for the greater share of blame annexed to that evening," said Elias. "The conduct of neither, if strictly examined, will be irreproachable, but since then, we have both, I hope, improved in civility."

"I cannot be so easily reconciled to myself. The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: 'Had you behaved in a more ladylike manner.' Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me;— though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice."

"I was certainly very far from expecting them to make so strong an impression. I had not the smallest idea of their being ever felt in such a way."

"I can easily believe it. You thought me then devoid of every proper feeling; I am sure you did. The turn of your countenance I shall never forget, as you said that I could not have addressed you in any possible way that would induce you to accept me."

"Oh! Do not repeat what I then said. These recollections will not do at all. I assure you that I have long been most heartily ashamed of it."

Darcy mentioned her letter. “Did it,” said she, “did it soon make you think better of me? Did you, on reading it, give any credit to its contents?”

He explained what its effect on him had been, and how gradually all his former prejudices had been removed.

“I knew,” said she, “that what I wrote must give you pain, but it was necessary. I hope you have destroyed the letter. There was one part especially, the opening of it, which I should dread your having the power of reading again. I can remember some expressions which might justly make you hate me.”

“The letter shall certainly be burnt, if you believe it essential to the preservation of my regard; but, though we have both reason to think my opinions not entirely unalterable, they are not, I hope, quite so easily changed as that implies.”

“When I wrote that letter,” replied Darcy, “I believed myself perfectly calm and cool, but I am since convinced that it was written in a dreadful bitterness of spirit.”

“The letter, perhaps, began in bitterness, but it did not end so. The adieu is charity itself. But think no more of the letter. The feelings of the person who wrote, and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then, that every unpleasant circumstance attending it ought to be forgotten. You must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure.”

“I cannot give you credit for any philosophy of the kind. *Your* retrospections must be so totally void of reproach, that the contentment arising from them is not of philosophy, but, what is much better, of innocence. But with *me*, it is not so. Painful recollections will intrude, which cannot, which ought not, to be repelled. I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice, though not in principle. As a child, I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately, an only daughter (for many years an only child), I was spoilt by my parents, who, though good themselves (my mother, particularly, all that was benevolent and amiable), allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing; to care for none beyond my own family circle; to think meanly of all the rest of the world; to wish at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty, and such I might still have been but for you, dearest,

loveliest Elias! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a man worthy of being pleased."

"Had you then persuaded yourself that I should?"

"Indeed I had. What will you think of my vanity? I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses."

"My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally, I assure you. I never meant to deceive you, but my spirits might often lead me wrong. How you must have hated me after *that* evening?"

"Hate you! I was angry perhaps at first, but my anger soon began to take a proper direction."

"I am almost afraid of asking what you thought of me, when we met at Pemberley. You blamed me for coming?"

"No indeed; I felt nothing but surprise."

"Your surprise could not be greater than *mine* in being noticed by you. My conscience told me that I deserved no extraordinary politeness, and I confess that I did not expect to receive *more* than my due."

"My object *then*," replied Darcy, "was to show you, by every civility in my power, that I was not so mean as to resent the past, and I hoped to obtain your forgiveness, to lessen your ill opinion, by letting you see that your reproofs had been attended to. How soon any other wishes introduced themselves I can hardly tell, but I believe in about half an hour after I had seen you."

She then told him of Georgius's delight in his acquaintance, and of his disappointment at its sudden interruption, which naturally leading to the cause of that interruption; he soon learnt that her resolution of following him from Derbyshire in quest of his brother had been formed before she quitted the inn, and that her gravity and thoughtfulness there had arisen from no other struggles than what such a purpose must comprehend.

He expressed his gratitude again, but it was too painful a subject to each, to be dwelt on farther.

After walking several miles in a leisurely manner, and too busy to know anything about it, they found at last, on examining their watches, that it was time to be at home.

"What could become of Mistress Bingley and James!" was a wonder which introduced the discussion of their affairs. Darcy was delighted with

their engagement; her friend had given her the earliest information of it.

“I must ask whether you were surprised?” said Elias.

“Not at all. When I went away, I felt that it would soon happen.”

“That is to say, you had given your permission. I guessed as much.”

And though she exclaimed at the term, he found that it had been pretty much the case.

“On the evening before my going to London,” said she, “I made a confession to her, which I believe I ought to have made long ago. I told her of all that had occurred to make my former interference in her affairs absurd and impertinent. Her surprise was great. She had never had the slightest suspicion. I told her, moreover, that I believed myself mistaken in supposing, as I had done, that your brother was indifferent to her, and as I could easily perceive that her attachment to him was unabated, I felt no doubt of their happiness together.”

Elias could not help smiling at her easy manner of directing her friend.

“Did you speak from your own observation,” said he, “when you told her that my brother loved her, or merely from my information last spring?”

“From the former. I had narrowly observed him during the two visits which I had lately made here, and I was convinced of his affection.”

“And your assurance of it, I suppose, carried immediate conviction to her.”

“It did. Bingley is most unaffectedly modest. Her diffidence had prevented her depending on her own judgment in so anxious a case, but her reliance on mine made everything easy. I was obliged to confess one thing, which for a time, and not unjustly, offended her. I could not allow myself to conceal that your brother had been in town three months last winter, that I had known it, and purposely kept it from her. She was angry. But her anger, I am persuaded, lasted no longer than she remained in any doubt of your brother’s sentiments. She has heartily forgiven me now.”

Elias longed to observe that Mistress Bingley had been a most delightful friend, so easily guided that her worth was invaluable, but he checked himself. He remembered that she had yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin. In anticipating the happiness of Bingley, which of course was to be inferior only to her own, she continued the conversation till they reached the house. In the hall, they parted.

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Chapter Fifty-Nine

"My dear Lee, where can you have been walking to?" was a question which Elias received from James as soon as he entered their room, and from all the others when they sat down to table. He had only to say in reply, that they had wandered about, till he was beyond his own knowledge. He coloured as he spoke, but neither that, nor anything else, awakened a suspicion of the truth.

The evening passed quietly, unmarked by anything extraordinary. The acknowledged lovers talked and laughed; the unacknowledged were silent. Darcy was not of a disposition in which happiness overflows in mirth, and Elias, agitated and confused, rather *knew* that he was happy than *felt* himself to be so, for, besides the immediate embarrassment, there were other evils before him. He anticipated what would be felt in the family when his situation became known; he was aware that no one liked her but James, and even feared that with the others, it was a *dislike* which not all her fortune and consequence might do away.

At night, he opened his heart to James. Though suspicion was very far from Master Bennet's general habits, he was absolutely incredulous here.

"You are joking, Lee. This cannot be!—engaged to Mistress Darcy! No, no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible."

"This is a wretched beginning indeed! My sole dependence was on you; and I am sure nobody else will believe me, if you do not. Yet, indeed, I am

in earnest. I speak nothing but the truth. She still loves me, and we are engaged."

James looked at him doubtingly. "Oh, Lee! It cannot be. I know how much you dislike her."

"You know nothing of the matter. *That* is all to be forgot. Perhaps I did not always love her so well as I do now. But in such cases as these, a good memory is unpardonable. This is the last time I shall ever remember it myself."

Master Bennet still looked all amazement. Elias again, and more seriously assured him of its truth.

"Good Heaven! Can it be really so? Yet now I must believe you," cried James. "My dear, dear Lee, I would—I do congratulate you—but are you certain? Forgive the question —are you quite certain that you can be happy with her?"

"There can be no doubt of that. It is settled between us already, that we are to be the happiest couple in the world. But are you pleased, James? Shall you like to have such a sister?"

"Very, very much. Nothing could give either Bingley or myself more delight. But we considered it; we talked of it as impossible. And do you really love her quite well enough? Oh, Lee! Do anything rather than marry without affection. Are you quite sure that you feel what you ought to do?"

"Oh, yes! You will only think I feel *more* than I ought to do, when I tell you all."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I must confess that I love her better than I do Bingley. I am afraid you will be angry."

"My dearest brother, now *be* serious. I want to talk very seriously. Let me know everything that I am to know without delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved her?"

"It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing her beautiful grounds at Pemberley."

Another entreaty that he would be serious, however, produced the desired effect, and he soon satisfied James by his solemn assurances of attachment. When convinced on that article, Master Bennet had nothing further to wish.

“Now I am quite happy,” said he, “for you will be as happy as myself. I always had a value for her. Were it for nothing but her love of you, I must always have esteemed her, but now, as Bingley’s friend and your wife, there can be only Bingley and yourself more dear to me. But Lee, you have been very sly, very reserved with me. How little did you tell me of what passed at Pemberley and Lambton! I owe all that I know of it to another, not to you.”

Elias told him the motives of his secrecy. He had been unwilling to mention Bingley, and the unsettled state of his own feelings had made him equally avoid the name of her friend. But now he would no longer conceal from him her share in Lydian’s marriage. All was acknowledged, and half the night spent in conversation.

“GOOD GRACIOUS!” cried Mr. Bennet, as he stood at a window the next morning, “if that disagreeable Mistress Darcy is not coming here again with our dear Bingley! What can she mean by being so tiresome as to be always coming here? I had no notion, but she would go a-shooting, or something or other, and not disturb us with her company. What shall we do with her? Lee, you must walk out with her again, that she may not be in Bingley’s way.”

Elias could hardly help laughing at so convenient a proposal, yet was really vexed that his father should be always giving her such an epithet.

As soon as they entered, Bingley looked at him so expressively, and shook hands with such warmth, as left no doubt of her good information, and she soon afterwards said aloud, “Mr. Bennet, have you no more lanes hereabouts in which Lee may lose his way again to-day?”

“I advise Mistress Darcy, and Lee, and Kit,” said Mr. Bennet, “to walk to Oakham Mount this morning. It is a nice long walk, and Mistress Darcy has never seen the view.”

“It may do very well for the others,” replied Mistress Bingley, “but I am sure it will be too much for Kit. Won’t it, Kit?” Kit owned that he had rather stay at home. Darcy professed a great curiosity to see the view from the Mount, and Elias silently consented. As he went upstairs to get ready, Mr. Bennet followed him, saying,

“I am quite sorry, Lee, that you should be forced to have that disagreeable woman all to yourself. But I hope you will not mind it: it is all

for James's sake, you know, and there is no occasion for talking to her except just now and then. So, do not put yourself to inconvenience."

During their walk, it was resolved that Mistress Bennet's consent should be asked in the course of the evening. Elias reserved to himself the application for his father's. He could not determine how his father would take it, sometimes doubting whether all her wealth and grandeur would be enough to overcome his abhorrence of the woman. But whether he were violently set against the match, or violently delighted with it, it was certain that his manner would be equally ill adapted to do credit to his sense; and he could no more bear that Mistress Darcy should hear the first raptures of his joy, than the first vehemence of his disapprobation.

In the evening, soon after Mistress Bennet withdrew to the library, he saw Mistress Darcy rise also and follow her, and his agitation on seeing it was extreme. He did not fear his mother's opposition, but she was going to be made unhappy, and that it should be through his means— that *he*, her favourite child, should be distressing her by his choice, should be filling her with fears and regrets in disposing of him—was a wretched reflection, and he sat in misery till Mistress Darcy appeared again, when, looking at her, he was a little relieved by her smile. In a few minutes, she approached the table where he was sitting with Kit and, while pretending to admire his work, said in a whisper, "Go to your mother; she wants you in the library." He was gone directly.

His mother was walking about the room, looking grave and anxious. "Lee," said she, "what are you doing? Are you out of your senses, to be accepting this woman? Have not you always hated her?"

How earnestly did he then wish that his former opinions had been more reasonable, his expressions more moderate! It would have spared him from explanations and professions which it was exceedingly awkward to give, but they were now necessary, and he assured her, with some confusion, of his attachment to Mistress Darcy.

"Or, in other words, you are determined to have her. She is rich, to be sure, and you may have more fine clothes and fine carriages than James. But will they make you happy?"

"Have you any other objection," said Elias, "than your belief of my indifference?"

"None at all. We all know her to be a proud, unpleasant sort of woman, but this would be nothing if you really liked her."

“I do, I do like her,” he replied, with tears in his eyes, “I love her. Indeed, she has no improper pride. She is perfectly amiable. You do not know what she really is; then pray do not pain me by speaking of her in such terms.”

“Lee,” said his mother, “I have given her my consent. She is the kind of woman, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse anything which she condescended to ask. I now give it to *you*, if you are resolved on having her. But let me advise you to think better of it. I know your disposition, Lee. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your wife, unless you looked up to her as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life. You know not what you are about.”

Elias, still more affected, was earnest and solemn in his reply; and at length, by repeated assurances that Mistress Darcy was really the object of his choice, by explaining the gradual change which his estimation of her had undergone, relating his absolute certainty that her affection was not the work of a day, but had stood the test of many months’ suspense, and enumerating with energy all her good qualities, he did conquer his mother’s incredulity, and reconcile her to the match.

“Well, my dear,” said she, when he ceased speaking, “I have no more to say. If this be the case, she deserves you. I could not have parted with you, my Lee, to anyone less worthy.”

To complete the favourable impression, he then told her what Mistress Darcy had voluntarily done for Lydian. She heard him with astonishment.

“This is an evening of wonders, indeed! And so, Darcy did everything: made up the match, gave the money, paid the willow’s debts, and got her her commission! So much the better. It will save me a world of trouble and economy. Had it been your aunt’s doing, I must and *would* have paid her, but these violent young lovers carry everything their own way. I shall offer to pay her to-morrow; she will rant and storm about her love for you, and there will be an end of the matter.”

She then recollected his embarrassment a few days before, on her reading Mistress Collins’s letter, and after laughing at him sometimes, allowed him, at last, to go—saying, as he quitted the room, “If any young women come for Matthew or Kit, send them in, for I am quite at leisure.”

Elias's mind was now relieved from a very heavy weight, and, after half an hour's quiet reflection in his own room, he was able to join the others with tolerable composure. Everything was too recent for gaiety, but the evening passed tranquilly away; there was no longer anything material to be dreaded, and the comfort of ease and familiarity would come in time.

When his father went up to his dressing-room at night, he followed him, and made the important communication. Its effect was most extraordinary, for on first hearing it, Mr. Bennet sat quite still and unable to utter a syllable. Nor was it under many, many minutes that he could comprehend what he heard; though not in general backward to credit what was for the advantage of his family, or that came in the shape of a lover to any of them. He began at length to recover, to fidget about in his chair, get up, sit down again, wonder, and bless himself.

"Good gracious! Lord bless me! Only think! Dear me! Mistress Darcy! Who would have thought it? And is it really true? Oh! My sweetest Lee! How rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! James's is nothing to it—nothing at all. I am so pleased—so happy. Such a charming woman!—So handsome! So tall!—Oh, my dear Lee! Pray apologise for my having disliked her so much before. I hope she will overlook it. Dear, dear Lee. A house in town! Everything that is charming! Three sons married! Ten thousand a year! Oh, Lord! What will become of me? I shall go distracted."

This was enough to prove that his approbation need not be doubted, and Elias, rejoicing that such an effusion was heard only by himself, soon went away. But before he had been three minutes in his own room, his father followed him.

"My dearest child," he cried, "I can think of nothing else! Ten thousand a year, and very likely more! 'Tis as good as a Lady! And a special licence. You must and shall be married by a special licence. But my dearest love, tell me what dish Mistress Darcy is particularly fond of, that I may have it to-morrow."

This was a sad omen of what his father's behaviour to the gentleman herself might be, and Elias found that, though in the certain possession of her warmest affection and secure of his relations' consent, there was still something to be wished for. But the morrow passed off much better than he expected; for Mr. Bennet luckily stood in such awe of his intended

daughter-in-law that he ventured not to speak to her, unless it was in his power to offer her any attention, or mark his deference for her opinion.

Elias had the satisfaction of seeing his mother taking pains to get acquainted with her, and Mistress Bennet soon assured him that she was rising every hour in her esteem.

“I admire all my three daughters-in-law highly,” said she. “Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite, but I think I shall like *your* wife quite as well as James’s.”

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Chapter Sixty

ELIAS'S SPIRITS soon rising to playfulness again, he wanted Mistress Darcy to account for her having ever fallen in love with him. "How could you begin?" said he. "I can comprehend your going on charmingly when you had once made a beginning, but what could set you off in the first place?"

"I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in the middle before I knew that I *had* begun."

"My beauty you had early withstood, and as for my manners—my behaviour to *you* was at least always bordering on the uncivil, and I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not. Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?"

"For the liveliness of your mind, I did."

"You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less. The fact is, that you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the men who were always speaking, and looking and thinking for *your* approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike *them*. Had you not been really amiable, you would have hated me for it, but in spite of the pains you took to disguise yourself, your feelings were always noble and just, and in your heart, you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted you. There—I have saved you the trouble of accounting for it, and really, all things considered, I begin

to think it perfectly reasonable. To be sure, you knew no actual good of me —but nobody thinks of *that* when they fall in love."

"Was there no good in your affectionate behaviour to James while he was ill at Netherfield?"

"Dearest James! Who could have done less for him? But make a virtue of it by all means. My good qualities are under your protection, and you are to exaggerate them as much as possible; and, in return, it belongs to me to find occasions for teasing and quarrelling with you as often as may be, and I shall begin directly by asking you what made you so unwilling to come to the point at last. What made you so shy of me, when you first called, and afterwards dined here? Why, especially, when you called, did you look as if you did not care about me?"

"Because you were grave and silent, and gave me no encouragement."

"But I was embarrassed."

"And so was I."

"You might have talked to me more when you came to dinner."

"A woman who had felt less, might."

"How unlucky that you should have a reasonable answer to give, and that I should be so reasonable as to admit it! But I wonder how long you *would* have gone *on*, if you had been left to yourself. I wonder when you *would* have spoken, if I had not asked you! My resolution of thanking you for your kindness to Lydian had certainly great effect. *Too much*, I am afraid, for what becomes of the moral if our comfort springs from a breach of promise? For I ought not to have mentioned the subject. This will never do."

"You need not distress yourself. The moral will be perfectly fair. Lord Christopher's unjustifiable endeavours to separate us were the means of removing all my doubts. I am not indebted for my present happiness to your eager desire of expressing your gratitude. I was not in a humour to wait for any opening of yours. My uncle's intelligence had given me hope, and I was determined at once to know everything."

"Lord Christopher has been of infinite use, which ought to make him happy, for he loves to be of use. But tell me, what did you come down to Netherfield for? Was it merely to ride to Longbourn and be embarrassed? Or had you intended any more serious consequence?"

"My real purpose was to see *you*, and to judge, if I could, whether I might ever hope to make you love me. My avowed one, or what I avowed

to myself, was to see whether your brother were still partial to Bingley, and if he were, to make the confession to her which I have since made."

"Shall you ever have courage to announce to Lord Christopher what is to befall him?"

"I am more likely to want more time than courage, Elias. But it ought to be done, and if you will give me a sheet of paper, it shall be done directly."

"And if I had not a letter to write myself, I might sit by you and admire the evenness of your writing, as another young gentleman once did. But I have an uncle, too, who must not be longer neglected."

From an unwillingness to confess how much his intimacy with Mistress Darcy had been over-rated, Elias had never yet answered Mr. Gardiner's long letter, but now, having *that* to communicate, which he knew would be most welcome, he was almost ashamed to find that his aunt and uncle had already lost three days of happiness, and immediately wrote as follows:

> "I would have thanked you before, my dear uncle, as I ought to have done, for your long, kind, satisfactory detail of particulars, but to say the truth, I was too cross to write. You supposed more than really existed. But now suppose as much as you choose; give a loose rein to your fancy, indulge your imagination in every possible flight which the subject will afford, and unless you believe me actually married, you cannot greatly err. You must write again very soon, and praise her a great deal more than you did in your last. I thank you, again and again, for not going to the Lakes. How could I be so silly as to wish it? Your idea of the ponies is delightful. We will go round the Park everyday. I am the happiest creature in the world. Perhaps other people have said so before, but not one with such justice. I am happier even than James; he only smiles, I laugh. Mistress Darcy sends you all the love in the world that she can spare from me. You are all to come to Pemberley at Christmas.
>
> Yours, &c."

Mistress Darcy's letter to Lord Christopher was in a different style, and still different from either was what Mistress Bennet sent to Mistress Collins in reply to her last.

“Dear Madam,

“I must trouble you once more for congratulations. Elias will soon be the husband of Mistress Darcy. Console Lord Christopher as well as you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the niece. She has more to give.

“Yours sincerely, &c.”

Master Bingley’s congratulations to his sister, on her approaching marriage, were all that was affectionate and insincere. He wrote even to James on the occasion, to express his delight, and repeat all his former professions of regard. James was not deceived, but he was affected, and though feeling no reliance on him, could not help writing him a much kinder answer than he knew was deserved.

The joy which Master Darcy expressed on receiving similar information, was as sincere as his sister’s in sending it. Four sides of paper were insufficient to contain all his delight, and all his earnest desire of being loved by his brother.

Before any answer could arrive from Mistress Collins, or any congratulations to Elias from her husband, the Longbourn family heard that the Collinses were come themselves to Lucas Lodge. The reason of this sudden removal was soon evident. Lord Christopher had been rendered so exceedingly angry by the contents of his niece’s letter, that Charlot, really rejoicing in the match, was anxious to get away till the storm was blown over. At such a moment, the arrival of his friend was a sincere pleasure to Elias, though in the course of their meetings he must sometimes think the pleasure dearly bought, when he saw Mistress Darcy exposed to all the parading and obsequious civility of his wife. She bore it, however, with admirable calmness. She could even listen to Dame Willemina Lucas, when she complimented her on carrying away the brightest jewel of the country, and expressed her hopes of their all meeting frequently at St. James’s, with very decent composure. If she did shrug her shoulders, it was not till Dame Willemina was out of sight.

Mr. Phillips’s vulgarity was another, and perhaps a greater, tax on her forbearance, and though Mr. Phillips, as well as his brother, stood in too much awe of her to speak with the familiarity which Bingley’s good humour encouraged, yet, whenever he *did* speak, he must be vulgar. Nor

was his respect for her, though it made him more quiet, at all likely to make him more elegant. Elias did all he could to shield her from the frequent notice of either, and was ever anxious to keep her to himself, and to those of his family with whom she might converse without mortification; and though the uncomfortable feelings arising from all this took from the season of courtship much of its pleasure, it added to the hope of the future; and he looked forward with delight to the time when they should be removed from society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley.

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Chapter Sixty-One

HAPPY FOR ALL HIS paternal feelings was the day on which Mr. Bennet got rid of his two most deserving sons. With what delighted pride, he afterwards visited Mr. Bingley and talked of Mr. Darcy, may be guessed. I wish I could say, for the sake of his family, that the accomplishment of his earnest desire in the establishment of so many of his children produced so happy an effect as to make him a sensible, amiable, well-informed man for the rest of his life; though perhaps it was lucky for his wife, who might not have relished domestic felicity in so unusual a form, that he still was occasionally nervous and invariably silly.

Mistress Bennet missed her second son exceedingly; her affection for him drew her oftener from home than anything else could do. She delighted in going to Pemberley, especially when she was least expected.

Mistress Bingley and James remained at Netherfield only a twelvemonth. So near a vicinity to his father and Meryton relations was not desirable even to *her* easy temper or *his* affectionate heart. The darling wish of her brothers was then gratified; she bought an estate in a neighbouring county to Derbyshire, and James and Elias, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other.

Kit, to his very material advantage, spent the chief of his time with his two elder brothers. In society so superior to what he had generally known, his improvement was great. He was not of so ungovernable a temper as Lydian, and, removed from the influence of Lydian's example, he became,

by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid. From the further disadvantage of Lydian's society, he was, of course, carefully kept, and though Mr. Wickham frequently invited him to come and stay with him, with the promise of balls and young women, his mother would never consent to him going.

Matthew was the only son who remained at home, and he was necessarily drawn from the pursuit of accomplishments by Mr. Bennet's being quite unable to sit alone. Matthew was obliged to mix more with the world, but he could still moralise over every morning visit, and as he was no longer mortified by comparisons between his brothers' beauty and his own, it was suspected by his mother that he submitted to the change without much reluctance.

As for Wickham and Lydian, their characters suffered no revolution from the marriage of his brothers. She bore with philosophy the conviction that Elias must now become acquainted with whatever of her ingratitude and falsehood had before been unknown to him and, in spite of everything, was not wholly without hope that Darcy might yet be prevailed on to make her fortune. The congratulatory letter which Elias received from Lydian on his marriage explained to him that, by her husband at least, if not by herself, such a hope was cherished. The letter was to this effect:

"My dear Lee,

> "I wish you joy. If you love Mistress Darcy half as well as I do my dear Wickham, you must be very happy. It is a great comfort to have you so rich, and when you have nothing else to do, I hope you will think of us. I am sure Wickham would like a place at court very much, and I do not think we shall have quite money enough to live upon without some help. Any place would do, of about three or four hundred a year; but however, do not speak to Mistress Darcy about it, if you had rather not.
>
> "Yours, &c."

As it happened that Elias had *much* rather not, he endeavoured in his answer to put an end to every entreaty and expectation of the kind. Such relief, however, as it was in his power to afford, by the practice of what

might be called economy in his own private expenses, he frequently sent them. It had always been evident to him that such an income as theirs, under the direction of two persons so extravagant in their wants, and heedless of the future, must be very insufficient to their support, and whenever they changed their quarters, either James or himself were sure of being applied to for some little assistance towards discharging their bills. Their manner of living, even when the restoration of peace dismissed them to a home, was unsettled in the extreme. They were always moving from place to place in quest of a cheap situation and always spending more than they ought. Her affection for him soon sunk into indifference; his lasted a little longer, and in spite of his youth and his manners, he retained all the claims to reputation which his marriage had given him.

Though Darcy could never receive *her* at Pemberley, yet, for Elias's sake, she assisted her further in her profession. Lydian was occasionally a visitor there when his wife was gone to enjoy herself in London or Bath, and with the Bingleys, they both of them frequently stayed so long that even Bingley's good humour was overcome, and she proceeded so far as to *talk* of giving them a hint to be gone.

Master Bingley was very deeply mortified by Darcy's marriage, but as he thought it advisable to retain the right of visiting at Pemberley, he dropped all his resentment, was fonder than ever of Georgius, almost as attentive to Darcy as heretofore, and paid off every arrear of civility to Elias.

Pemberley was now Georgius's home, and the attachment of the brothers was exactly what Darcy had hoped to see. They were able to love each other even as well as they intended. Georgius had the highest opinion in the world of Elias, though at first, he often listened with an astonishment bordering on alarm at his lively, sportive manner of talking to his sister. She, who had always inspired in himself a respect which almost overcame his affection, he now saw the object of open pleasantry. His mind received knowledge which had never before fallen in his way. By Elias's instructions, he began to comprehend that a man may take liberties with his wife, which a sister will not always allow in a brother more than ten years younger than herself.

Lord Christopher was extremely indignant on the marriage of his niece, and as he gave way to all the genuine frankness of his character in his reply to the letter which announced its arrangement, he sent her language so very

abusive, especially of Elias, that for some time all intercourse was at an end. But at length, by Elias's persuasion, she was prevailed on to overlook the offence, and seek a reconciliation, and, after a little further resistance on the part of her uncle, his resentment gave way, either to his affection for her, or his curiosity to see how her husband conducted himself; and he condescended to wait on them at Pemberley, in spite of that pollution which its woods had received, not merely from the presence of such a master, but the visits of his aunt and uncle from the city.

With the Gardiners, they were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elias, really loved them, and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing him into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them.

FINIS.

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About Jane Austen

“Jane Austen was born on the 16th of December, 1775, at Steventon, in the county of Hant. […]

“She expired […] on Friday the 18th of July, 1817, in the arms of her sister […]

“Faultless herself, as nearly as human nature can be, she always sought, in the faults of others, something to excuse, to forgive or forget. Where extenuation was impossible, she had a sure refuge in silence. She never uttered either a hasty, a silly, or a severe expression. In short, her temper was as polished as her wit. Nor were her manners inferior to her temper. They were of the happiest kind. No one could be often in her company without feeling a strong desire of obtaining her friendship, and cherishing a hope of having obtained it She was tranquil without reserve or stiffness; and communicative without intrusion or self-sufficiency. She became an authoress entirely from taste and inclination. Neither the hope of fame nor profit mixed with her early motives […]

“She read aloud with very great taste and effect. Her own works, probably, were never heard to so much advantage as from her own mouth; for she partook largely in all the best gifts of the comic muse. She was a warm and judicious admirer of landscape, both in nature and on canvass. At a very early age she was enamoured of Gilpin on the Picturesque; and she seldom changed her opinions either on books or men.

Her reading was very extensive in history and belles lettres; and her memory extremely tenacious. Her favourite moral writers were Johnson in prose, and Cowper in verse […] Without the slightest affectation, she

recoiled from everything gross. Neither nature, wit, nor humour, could make her amends for so very low a scale of morals.

Her power of inventing characters seems to have been intuitive, and almost unlimited.

She drew from nature; but, whatever may have been surmised to the contrary, never from individuals.

The style of her familiar correspondence was in all respects the same as that of her novels. Everything came finished from her pen, for on all subjects, she had ideas as clear as her expressions were well chosen. It is not hazarding too much to say that she never dispatched a note or letter unworthy of publication.

One trait only remains to be touched on.

It makes all others unimportant. She was thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature. On serious subjects she was well-instructed, both by reading and meditation, and her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church.

London, Dec. 13, 1817."

Excerpts From

"Biological Notice of the Author", which was written by Henry Austen, Jane Austen's brother.

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Thank you

Peace be upon you.

Thank you to my parents, M. and H.,

my husband and our children,

my brothers,

my husband's parents and his siblings,

my sister-in-laws, my brother-in-law,

my uncles and aunts,

my cousins and their spouses,

my nieces and nephews,

my friends,

my teachers,

my classmates and schoolmates,

my neighbours and co-workers.

Thank you all for being in my life and for blessing me with your love, affection, support and care.

Praise and thanks be to God, for blessing me with life and for making me a believer.

And thank you to the readers who love this book.

I am honoured by your love.

PS#

According to The National Archives of The United Kingdom's website:

https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/

Mistress Darcy's wealth is as follows:

1813: £ 10,000 a year

2017: £ 465,252.00 a year

2017: $ 590,939.52 a year

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Coolness of My Eyes

Assalamoalaikum. Your super attractive husband is home.

Where is the love of my life, the woman of my dreams?

There you are! Assalamoalaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

Look at you, looking beautiful as ever.

Of course, I look handsome. I am your husband, after all. You would only marry the most handsome man on Earth cause that's what you deserve.

The flight was okay. I missed you. How are you, my love? Wait. You look sad. What's going on? Come give me a hug.

There you go. Nice and snug in my arms. What's wrong, love? Have you been feeling down? Let me see your face.

Have you been feeling lonely?

I'm really sorry about that. I promise that I will shower you with my love for all the times I’m not around, InshaAllah. I love you. You are my favourite person in the world. You know that, right?

SubhanAllah, my love. Look at me.

You know I love you, right? With all my heart. It kills me when you are sad. Please write down every time you cried. That way, I can comfort you for all the times I wasn't here to kiss your tears away.

My love, I missed you too. I missed you like my heart was hollow. I know that some of the trials from Allah have been taking a toll on you, but that is how Allah purifies us. We may fall down to our knees in our trials, but we fall upwards in rank towards Allah.

You can do it, my love. You can do it. Believe in our Rabb, Ar Rahman, Ar Raheem, our Cherisher and Sustainer. Our Rabb has never disappointed us. He has always saved us. He is our Waliy. As long as we call on Him and ask for forgiveness, Allah will shower all the good we need on us.

Sometimes we feel like this life is so long and painful, and that we want to rush and go to Paradise. But let us have patience in Allah's decree. Let us be thankful for all that He has given us.

When we are sad, we like to focus on the one thing or the few things that are making us sad. But we forget about the million things that are going right in life, like the individual cells in our body. Our eyes work, our limbs work, we can use our voice, we are mobile. We have a roof over our heads, a car that works, and food in our fridge. We are relatively healthy.

I know that your health trials have been bothering you and that you miss how you used to look. But you are still beautiful, and Alhamdulillah, you are the most beautiful woman to me, inside and out.

This life is the ultimate test. Allah knows what our limits are. Allah only tests us with our own potential.

Take solace in the fact that those who get closer to Allah get harder trials. Allah is burning your sins away to make you purified gold.

Look at the lives of the Anbiya. They had the most difficult lives, and look how grateful and persistent they were. You can do it too, my love. I believe in you.

Let's say some dhikr and feel better together.

Audhubillah himinash shaytawnir rawjeem

Bismillah hir rahman nir raheem

Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un

La ilaha illallahu wahdahu, la sharika lahu, lahul mulku wa lahul hamdu, wa huwa ala kulli shayin qadeer. Rabbighfirli.

La ḥawla wala quwwata illa billahil aliyyil azeem.

La ilaha illallah muhammadur rasulullah. Salallahu alayhi wa sallam.

SubhanAllah. Alhamdulillah. Allahu Akbar.

Rabbanaa habb lanaa, min azwaajinaa, wa dhurriyaatinaa qurrawta a’yunnew wa jaalnaa lilmuttaqeena imaamaa.

Hasbunallah wa ni'mal wakeel. Ni'mal mowla wa ni'man naseer.

La illaha illa anta, subhanaka, inni kuntu minaz-zawlimin. Rabbighfirli.

Ameen.

How are you feeling, love? Better?

Alhamdulillah.

I'm going to take a shower. Wanna join me? I know you want to. Your handsome husband is your eye candy, after all.

Come, darling. Let's take a nice, warm shower, and then I'll make you some soup for tonight. Any special soup you have been craving lately?

“Kisses soup” is not a thing, but I will gladly make any soup while I kiss you.

Let's go, darling, before Maghrib comes. You can kiss me more in the shower.

It's so good to be home, my love. I really missed you.

Love, what is that?

Wow! I love it! You know me well.

Alhamdulillah. I am so happy that you are my wife forever, InshaAllah. Alhamdulillah.

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